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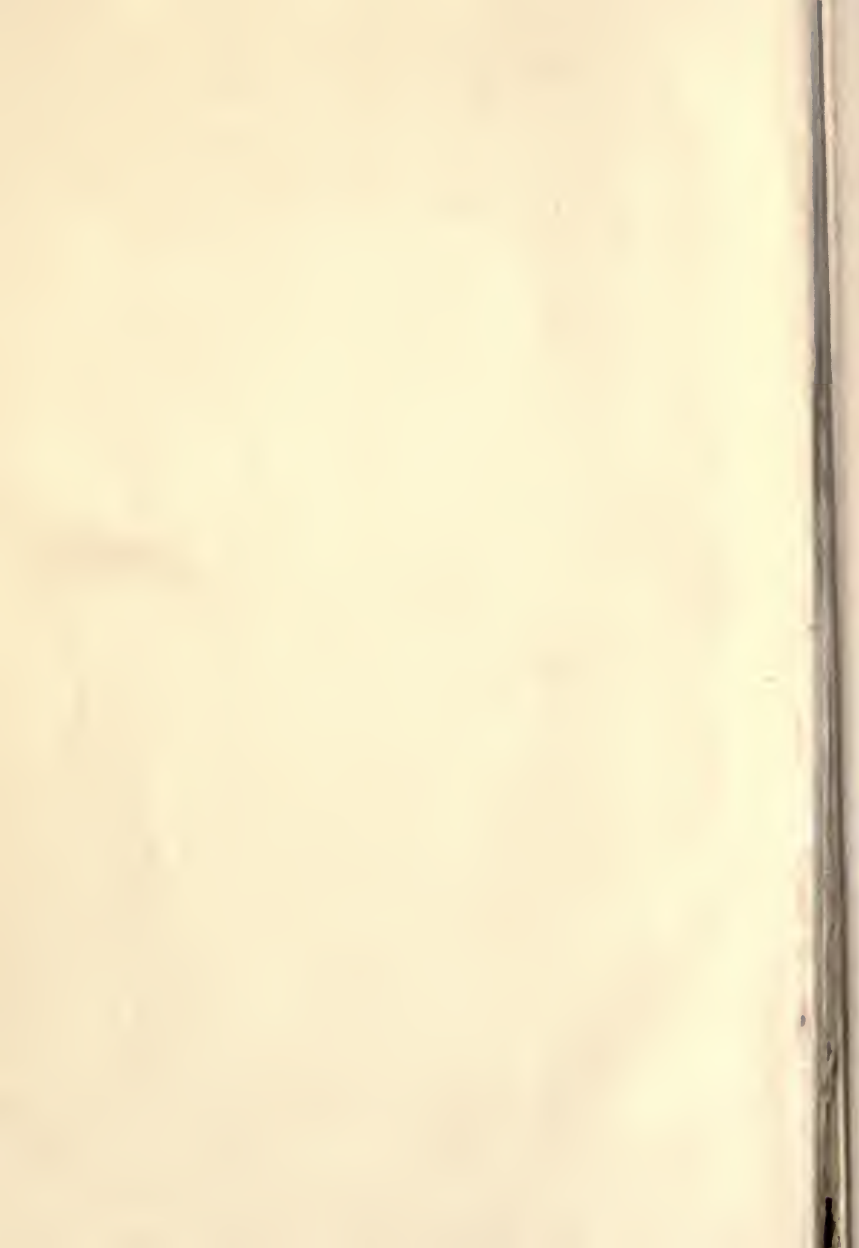


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GAELIC FOLK TALES

A SUPPLEMENTARY READER

By

MARY GRANT O'SHERIDAN

SOUTH MADISON, WISCONSIN

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Foreword

This little book is but a glimpse of a fairy structure whose beauty has no peer, and whose antiquity antedates all others of its kind, except the Hellenic. I have chosen it out of that which Julius Pokarney calls "a fresh fountain of lore and legend, almost inexhaustible, belonging to the Gaels, to the Irish Gaels." To Mr. Michael O'Gallagher and Mr. David Ryan Twomey of the Gaelic Society of Chicago, I am indebted for kindest assistance in writing the notes. My book is but a wee "chraoibhin," yet I hope to see the time of its blossom and fruitage. How can I better express myself than in the beautiful lines of Ethna Carbery:

"O little green bud, break and blow into flower,
Break and blow through the welcome of sunshine and shower;
'Twas a long night and dreary you hid there forlorn,
But now the cold hills wear the radiance of morn!

O wind-drifted branch, lift your head to the sun,
For the sap of new life in your veins hath begun!"

—MARY GRANT O'SHERIDAN.

Chraoibhin [Crēē vēēn]: A branch.

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The Quest of the Eric Fine

CHAPTER I.



LIDDEN away in the hills of the beautiful island of Eire, there dwell to-day a fairy people called the Sidhe. In olden times, before the enchantment fell upon them, these people were large of stature and comely of feature; skilled in the arts of war and peace; lovers of beauty, of freedom and of song.

The name by which they were called was Tuatha De Danann. They came with their king, Nuada, to Eire and fought the Firbolgs, the people who at that time inhabited the island, and being victorious they took possession. But in their last great encounter, the battle of Magh Tuireadh, a Firbolg warrior cut off the hand of Nuada the De Danann king.

The loss of his kingship went with that of his hand; for no one with a personal blemish could

Eric: restitution. Eire [Ār'-yā]: Name of Ireland in the Gaelic language. Sidhe [Shē]: Fairies. Tuatha De Danann [Thōō' ā hā Dā Dān' ānn]: The tribes of the God Danu; the gods of the pagan Irish. Nuada [Nōō' āh]. Firbolgs [Fēer' bolgs]. Magh Tuireadh [Māw Tū' rāh]: Battle fought, according to the annals of the Four Masters, between the Tuatha De Danann and the Fomorians in the year of the world 3330 on a field in the County Sligo.

be a sovereign of the Tuatha De Danann. The people chose in his stead Breas, whose mother was a De Danann and whose father was Balor, king of the Lochlanns, called by the Tuatha De Danann "Fomorians" or sea robbers.

Now the Fomorians had a foothold in Eire, and had for a long time exacted tribute from the people and otherwise oppressed and harassed them. Breas, on becoming king, proved a true Fomorian outdoing all others in unjust and niggardly deeds; until so great was the burden imposed upon the people by him that, after a year of secret meetings and discussions on the part of eminent De Dananns, he was deposed. Then Nuada, for whom a silver hand had been made, was again given the kingship. And thenceforth he was known as Nuada of the Silver Hand.

At this time each year in the island of Eire, the De Dananns were compelled to pay taxes to the Fomorians. There were taxes on kneading troughs, querns, and baking flags; and also an ounce of gold for each one of their number. If any one neglected or refused to pay, his nose was cut off by the Fomorian tyrants.

When Nuada had again become ruler of Eire, and the time of tax paying drew near, he called

Breas [Bräss]. Balor [Bah'lor]. Loch'lanns: Scandinavians.
 Querns [kwärns]: stone hand mills for grinding corn. The pictures
 in Century Dictionary are taken from querns in the Dublin Museum.

a great fair-meeting on the hill of Usna, the place where the people came to pay. Also, Nuada sent for his friend and councillor, Lugha the Ildana, to attend the fair-meeting.

And after a great multitude of people had assembled from near and far, they saw a band of warriors mounted on white steeds coming toward them from the east. At their head rode a young champion, tall and comely, with a countenance bright and glorious as the setting sun. This was the king's friend, the Ildana; and the troop he led was the Fairy Host from the Land of Promise.

He rode the steed of Manannan Mac Lir, Enbar of the flowing mane. No warrior was ever killed on the back of this steed, for she was as swift as the clear, cold wind of spring; and, she traveled with equal ease on land or sea. Lugha wore Manannan's coat of mail; no one could be wounded through it, or above it, or below it. He had on Manannan's breast-plate, which no weapon could pierce. In the front of his helmet were two glittering precious stones; and one shone from the back. Also, at his left side hung Manannan's sword, "The Answerer";

Usna [Ūos'nä]: This hill is in Westmeath, about ten miles from Athlone, the center of Eire. Lugha the Ildana [Lōō' ah the Ēldän'äh]: The All-Knowing-One; the Gaelic Apollo. Manannan Mac Lir [Män'-nä-nän Mac Lēer]: Son of the Sea; the Gaelic Neptune.

and whenever he took off his helmet his face glowed like the sun on a dry day in summer.

Hardly were the greetings of the king and the Ildana over when another company was seen approaching the hill of Usna. Nine times nine surly, Fomorian tax-gatherers were coming to demand their yearly tribute from the men of Eire.

When they reached the place where the king sat, the entire assembly—the king included—rose up before the tax-gatherers. Then the Ildana spoke to the king and said: "Why hast thou, O King, arisen before this hateful looking company?"

"We dare not do otherwise" answered the king, "for if even an infant a month old should remain seated before them, they would deem it good cause for killing us all."

Lugha, the Ildana, brooded over this in silence for a while, and then he said: "Of a truth, I feel a great desire to kill all these men!"

"Thy deed would only bring evil upon us," said King Nuada, "for then the Fomorians would send an army to destroy us all."

Nevertheless the Ildana, vowing that the people should no longer be oppressed, started up and rushing upon the Fomorians dealt red slaughter

among them. Neither did he hold his hand until he had slain them all except nine. These he spared because they had implored the protection of the king.

After Lugha had put his sword back into its scabbard, he said to the nine living tax-collectors: "I would slay you also; did I not wish you to go and tell your king and all the nations what you have seen this day in Eire.

The nine men then returned to their own country. When they had told their story, King Balor of the mighty Blows asked them the name of the warrior who had wrought such woe to his Fomorians.

"Behold, O King," said they, "on the hill of Usna, in Eire, by the hand of a single man hath our number been thus diminished; but the name of the champion we cannot tell thee."

But Kethlenda, the Queen, said: "This must be the Ildana. It has been foretold that he would oppose our sway in Eire."

King Balor then called a council of the Fomorians. Among those who came to his palace of Berva were Luath, the story teller; Sotal of the large heels, Tinna of Triscadel; Loskina of the bare knees; Lobas the Druid; and also the nine

Kethlenda [Këll'yän]; Inniskillen is named for this Queen. Berva [Bär'väh]. This place is constantly spoken of in Irish Folk Tales as the chief stronghold of the Lochlanns. It is believed by some to be the same as the modern Bergen in Norway. Luath [Lōō'ah].

prophetic poets and philosophers of the Fomorianians.

They could not decide what to do until Breas, the son of Balor, bitter with the thought of his banishment from the throne of Eire, arose and said: "I will go to Eire with seven great battalions of the Fomorian army; and I will give battle to Ildana; and I will bring his head to the palace of Berva."

All the chiefs agreed to have him go.

Ships were made ready for the ocean voyage. Their seams were calked with pitch, and filled with sweet smelling frankincense. Abundant food and war stores were also provided.

When the fighting men had been gathered together, they arrayed themselves in battle dress and set out for Eire.

As they were about to embark, Balor said: "When your work of conquest is over, put your cables around this island of Eire and tie it to the sterns of your ships, and take it to the northern side of Lochlann and there leave it. Then will it give us no more trouble."

Breas and his batallions hoisted their many colored sails, loosed their moorings and were wafted out upon the wide sea. They did not slacken

Sotal [Süt'tle]. Tris' ca del. Loskina [Lüs' kin na]. Druid, in Gaelic Draoi [Dhrēē]; Tree worshipers; a class set apart and consecrated to religion and the preservation of genealogies. All civil rights were based on the patriarchal system.

speed until they reached the harbor of Eas Dara. Here they landed and immediately began to spoil and waste the province of Olnecmacht, where Bove Derg was king.

Eas [Ähs]: Waterfall. Harbor of Eas Dara is found on Ptolomy's map.
See New Ireland Review, Vol. 26. Olnecmacht: Very ancient name of Connacht.

CHAPTER II.

The news of what they had done came to the Ildana at Teamhair; so the following morning early, when the point of night met day, he departed on his steed, Enbar of the flowing mane, and rode westward toward the palace of Bove Derg.

He had not traveled far when he saw, at a distance, three warriors fully armed riding toward him. These men were Kian, Ku and Kethen, the sons of Canta. Kian was Lugha's father, and when they met they saluted each other, and Kian asked his son why he was thus speeding toward the west.

"I am going to give battle to the Fomorians, for they have wasted the kingdom of Bove Derg."

When the warriors heard this they said: "We will go to battle with you, and each of us will ward off a hundred Fomorians."

"But first," said the Ildana, "I wish you to summon the Fairy Host to fight with me."

This the sons of Canta with one accord consented to do, and forthwith they separated. Ku and Kethen fared south; while Kian rode northward until he came to Magh Murthemna.

Teamhair [Toy'er]: present Tara. Kian [Kēy' an]. Ku [Kūh].
Kethen [Kā' yēnn]. Canta [Kant'yāh]. Magh Murthemna:
[Maw Mūr hev' na].

As he journeyed over the plain he met the three sons of Tuireann: Brian, Ur and Urcar, who were at deadly feud with the three sons of Canta.

"If my brothers were with me now, we should have a brave fight, but as I am only one against three it is better to avoid the combat," thought Kian. Looking around he saw a herd of swine near by, so he struck himself with a golden, druidical wand, and turned himself into a pig.

No sooner had he done this than Brian said to his brothers: "Tell me, my brothers, what has become of the warrior that we saw just now approaching us on the plain?"

"We have seen him" they answered, "but we know not whither he has gone."

"Well, I can tell you what has happened to the warrior," said Brian. "He has changed himself by a druidical spell into a pig; and is now among yonder herd; and, whoever he may be, one thing is sure: he is no friend of ours."

"This is an unlucky matter," said the brothers, "for even if we should kill the entire herd of pigs, the enchanted one might escape."

"There is but one thing to do," said Brian, and then he struck his brothers with his golden, druidical wand, and turned them into two fleet, slender

Tuireann [Thër'än]. Brian [Brēc' an].

sharp-nosed hounds. The moment he had done this, the hounds put their noses to the earth and set off toward the pigs.

When the druidical pig saw them coming, it made toward a thick spinney that grew near by. But Brian was there before him and drove a spear through its chest. The pig screamed and said: "You have done an ill deed to cast your spear at me, for you know very well who I am."

"Your voice, methinks, is the voice of a man," said Brian, "but I know not who you are."

"I am Kian, the son of Canta," said the pig, "and I pray you give me quarter."

Brian's brothers had regained their own shapes by this time and they said: "Quarter you shall have indeed, and we are very sorry for what has happened you."

But Brian stepping between them said: "I swear by the gods of the air, that if your life returned to you seven times, yet would I take it from you seven times."

"Then," said Kian, "since you will not grant me quarter, allow me first to return to my own shape."

"That I will grant you," said Brian, "for I often find it easier to kill a man than to kill a pig."

Kian, accordingly, took his own shape. Then he said to the sons of Tuireann: "You are indeed about to slay me; but, even so, I have outwitted you. If you had slain me in the shape of a pig you would have had to pay only the eric-fine for a pig, whereas, now that I am in my own shape you shall pay the full eric-fine for a man. And never has there been so great a fine as that which you shall pay."

Nevertheless, Brian and his brothers slew Kian and they buried him a man's height in the earth. But the earth, being angry at their wicked deed, refused to keep the body. Not until they had buried it the seventh time did it remain in the ground. When the last turf was laid, and they turned to go away, a voice spoke from the earth saying:

"The blood you have spilled,
The hero you have killed,
Shall follow your steps 'till the doom be fulfilled."

Lugha, the Ildana, meanwhile, had traveled westward until he reached Ath-Luan; and then the Curlieu hills; and finally came to the mountain of Kesh-Corran and the great plain of the assembly, where the foreigners were en-

Ath Luan [A'w Loo' an]: Present town of Athlone.
in County Sligo.

Curlieu hills:

camped with the spoils of Olnecmacht around them.

As Lugha drew near the Fomorian encampment, Breas, the son of Balor, arose and said he: "A wonderful thing has come to pass this day, for the sun, it seems to me, has risen in the west!"

"It would be better were it so," said the Druids, "but the light you see is the brightness of the face, and the flashing of the weapons of Lugha, the Ildana, our deadly enemy; he who slew our tax-gatherers."

By this time the Ildana had come up to them, and he peacefully saluted them.

"How comes it that you salute us," said they, "since you are, as we well know, our enemy?"

"Enemy though you think me, I am now come in peace and good will to ask you to send back to the people of Bove Derg all the milch cows which you have taken from them."

"May ill luck follow thee until thou get one of them," said the Fomorian leaders in loud, angry voices.

But, nevertheless, the Ildana straightway put a druidical spell upon the plundered cattle and sent every milch cow home to the door of her owner's house.

Before the Fomorians could recover from their surprise, the Fairy Host arrived. They placed themselves under the Ildana's command; and they made ready for the fight.

The Ildana put on Manannan's coat of mail and his breast-plate. He took also his helmet which is called Cannbar; and his broad, dark-blue shield he slung from one shoulder. His sword hung from his thigh; and, in his hand he grasped his two spears, tempered in the blood of adders.

When the chiefs and men were all arrayed in battle rank, hedges of glittering spears rose high above their heads. Their shields, placed edge to edge, formed a firm fence around them. They advanced against the Fomorians, and the Fomorians, in no degree dismayed, answered their onset.

Clouds of whizzing javelins flew through the air; spears were shattered; and, from the gold-hilted swords a forest of bright flames arose, as they clashed above the helmets.

When finally Breas was compelled to sue for quarter from the Ildana, all the Fomorians dropped their arms and came to him to ask him to spare their lives.

The Ildana said to them: "I do not wish to slay you; return, you and your leader to your own country; and there relate the deeds of prowess you have seen in Eire." So they departed.

Lugha missed his father, Kian, in the fight. "My father is not alive," said he, "for if he lived he would surely have come to help me in the battle. And now I swear that neither food nor drink will I take until I find his slayer and the manner of his death."

Accordingly he set out with a small band, and hastened to the plain of Murthemna, where Kian had been forced to take the shape of a pig.

And it chanced that they came to the very spot where Kian had been slain. Then the stones of the earth spoke beneath their feet saying: "Here lies thy father, O Ildana! Grievous was Kian's strait when he was forced to take the shape of a pig, on seeing the three sons of Tuireann. And on this very spot they slew him in his own shape.

"The blood they have spilled;
The hero they have killed,
Shall darken their lives 'till the doom be fulfilled."

Then the Ildana caused a stone to be raised

above his father's grave, and his name engraved in Ogham. After this his lamentation lays were sung and his funeral games performed.

Then the Ildana and his followers went to Teamhair. They entered the banqueting hall where the king and his nobles were assembled. The Ildana, looking around the hall, saw the three sons of Tuireann seated among the others. He hastened to exchange greetings with Nuada, the king. Then he asked the royal permission that the chain of silence might be shaken. When the silver music of the bells had died away, and all were listening, Lugha, the Ildana, stood up and said: "O gracious nobles of the De Danann race, I perceive that you have given me your attention; and now, I have a question to put to each man here present: 'What vengeance should be taken for the murder of a father?'"

All were filled with amazement to hear the Ildana ask this question. Then the King's voice broke the deep silence: "Explain thy meaning. Why hast thou put this question to us? Surely, as we all know, thy father has not been killed."

"My father has indeed been killed," said the Ildana, and I now see here in this hall those who slew him. And furthermore, I know the manner

Ogham [Ō'ām]: The most ancient manner of writing or making records known to Gaels of Eire. There are many stones inscribed in Ogham still extant.

in which they put him to death; even as they themselves know it."

The sons of Tuireann hearing all this said nothing. But the king declared that if anyone had willfully slain Kian he should atone for the deed with his life.

Each noble said the same; as did also the sons of Tuireann.

"The persons who slew my father are here present, and are joining with the rest in this judgment" said the Ildana. "Let all bear witness that my claim is just and honorable when I demand, not their lives, but that they shall pay to me a certain eric-fine."

Then Brian arose and said: "It is of me thou speakest, O Ildana, for it has been said that the three sons of Tuireann have been at enmity with the three sons of Canta. We shall not say whether we have slain thy father or not; but, we are willing to pay an eric-fine even as if we had killed him."

"I shall accept the eric-fine from you" said the Ildana, "and I now name before this assembly the fine I ask: The first part is three apples; the second part, the skin of a pig; the third part a spear; the fourth two steeds and a chariot; the

fifth seven pigs; the sixth a hound whelp; the seventh a cooking spit, and the eighth three shouts on a hill. This is my eric-fine O sons of Tuireann, and it will be for you to set about paying it without delay."

"We do not deem thy eric-fine too great, Ildana, but we fear some hidden snare in what you ask," said Brian.

"The fine I have named, and that only, will satisfy me for the death of my father" replied the Ildana. "Moreover, I demand that we enter into a covenant, namely: I not to increase my claim; thou to pay the full fine required of thee." So they bound themselves on either side; and the king and nobles of Eire were witnesses and sureties of the bond.

Then the Ildana, arising, said: "Listen, O sons of Tuireann, the three apples I ask are the three apples of the garden of Hisberna in the western end of the world—and no other will I have. Their color is the color of burnished gold, and they have the taste of honey. A champion possessing one of them may perform with it any feat he pleases, by merely casting it from his hand. Nor will he lose the apple for it will return again to him of itself. The pig's skin I seek belongs to the king of

Hisberna: Hesperides.

Greece. This magical skin will turn water into wine. It will also heal all the sick and wounded people who touch it. The spear which ye must bring me is the venomed spear of Pezar, king of the East. In the time of peace, its blazing, fiery head is always kept in a caldron of water to prevent it from burning down the king's palace. In time of war its bearer is invincible. The two steeds and the chariot belong to Dobar, king of Segar. With these steeds and chariot, one travels as well on the sea as on the land. The seven pigs I demand belong to the king of the Golden Pillars. Though these pigs should be killed and eaten to-day, they will be alive and well tomorrow. The hound whelp belongs to the king of Iroda. His name is Failinis; and all beasts of the forest fall powerless before him. The cooking spit belongs to the warlike women of Fincara. They are thrice fifty in number, and each of them is a match for three good warriors in single combat. These women of Fincara have never been known to give a cooking spit to anyone without being first overcome in battle. The hill on which you must give three shouts is the hill of Midkenna in the north of Lochlann. Midkenna and his sons always guard this hill, and are under geasa to

Failinis [Fāwl'ēen ish]. Iroda [Ēr'ōō əh]: Norway. Midkenna: The ungentle; Gaelic: Meochavin [Mēē' ō kēen]. Geasa [gās'säh]: mystical bonds or obligations, corresponding to the obligations under which the knights of the middle ages placed themselves.

allow no one to shout on it. And should you procure all things that I have mentioned you shall not, I think, succeed in shouting on the hill; for, Midkenna and his sons were my father's friends and loved him very much; and they will be sure to avenge on you my father's death."

The sons of Tuireann were so much astonished on hearing this éric-fine, that they spoke not one word; but arose and left the meeting and repaired to the house of their father.

CHAPTER III

Tuireann heard their story to the end; then he said: "Your tidings are very bad, my sons. It was an evil thing to kill Kian, and I fear you are doomed to meet your death in seeking what the Ildana demands. In the Boyne river, near the palace of Angus, lies Manannan's canoe, "The Wave Sweeper." Secure this canoe and by its aid you may be able to reach Hisberna and obtain the magic apples. So they set out for Bruga of the Boyne; and with them was their sister Eithne.

They found the canoe lying in the river. Brian, stepping into it said: "It seems to me there is room for but one more person beside myself in the canoe." He began to complain bitterly of its size; but ceased when Eithne told him that the canoe would assume larger dimensions when they came to try it. Eithne was aware that it had the power of becoming large or small according to the number of people who were to sail in it.

After all preparations were over, the three brothers bade their sister farewell and entered the canoe. They found it large enough to hold

Bruga [Brōō' ah]: A palace; Bruga of the Boyne: The residence of the chiefs of the Tuatha De Danann. Eithne [Ā'nāh]. Canoe: Gaelic [Kūr' rāh]. Manannan's canoe: A cloud which becomes larger or smaller, according to the number of raindrops in it.

themselves and their arms, and everything else they wished to take with them.

As they quickly sped across the deep sea chasms and green-sided waves on their way to Hisberna, they held council as to what course they would pursue in their quest for the golden apples.

Brian spoke; and said he: "Let us take the shape of strong, swift hawks; then, as we approach the garden, let us have a care for the light, sharp lances of the guards. These lances the guards will certainly hurl at us. We must avoid them actively and cunningly; and when they have no more left to throw, let us swoop down and fetch away an apple each."

To this they all agreed. Changing themselves into three beautiful hawks they flew swiftly over the tops of the trees.

The sharp-eyed guards perceived them, and with great shouting and clamor hurled venomous darts at them. But the hawks escaped, every one.

When there were no more darts to throw, fluttering their wings above the baffled guards, the hawks flew into the trees. After resting a moment, they rose in the air again unhurt and happy. The younger brothers carried off an

apple apiece; but Brian brought two with him; one in his talons, and one in his beak.

The king of Hisberna and his people were very angry, on discovering that the hawks had carried off their apples. A council, was called to consider how best the deed might be avenged.

Now the king's three daughters were skilled in magic; and cunning in council. So it was finally determined that they should transform themselves into three swift, winged griffins and pursue the hawks over the sea.

Immediately then, they hastened away. From their eyes and beaks they let fly bright flashes of flame to blind and scorch the hawks.

"Evil is our state," now said the two younger brothers as they beheld their most beautiful wing feathers crisping and crumbling in smoky dust through the heated air—"evil indeed is our state and we will surely perish if we do not get relief."

"It is my good fortune still to have power to change our forms," said Brian. Then, by his druidical magic, he instantly turned himself and his brothers into swans, and they all dropped down on to the sea.

The griffins, no longer beholding the hawks

before them, gave up the chase, and the sons of Tuireann, without further delay, went to their canoe fetching their apples with them.

Then they set sail again and glided swiftly and smoothly over the waters until they came to Greece. And when they had landed, Brian said to his brothers: "In what shape, think you, should we go to the king's court?"

"We think it best to go in our own shapes," answered the others, "that is to say as three bold champions."

"Not so," said Brian, "to me it seems best that we should go in guise of learned poets from Eire, for poets are held in much honor by the nobles of Greece." "How shall we do that?" asked the brothers, "for as to poems, we neither have any with us, nor do we know how to compose them."

But Brian would not have it any other way, so they consented, though unwillingly. They tied up their hair after the manner of poets and going directly to the palace knocked at the door. The door-keeper asked who was there. "We are skillful poets from Eire," said Brian, and have come to Greece with a poem for the king."

The door-keeper departed to give the message.

"Let them be brought in," said the king, "for

it is to seek a good and bountiful master, whom they may serve faithfully that they have come so far from Eire."

So they were shown into the banquet hall, where the king sat surrounded by his nobles. Bowing low they saluted him; and he in turn saluted them. They joined the feast at once and made merry as did the others. And they thought they had never seen a banquet hall more grand or a household so numerous and mirthful.

At the proper time the king's poets arose, and according to custom recited their poems for the company. When they had finished, Brian requested attention for his poem, and, forthwith, in clear, musical accents spoke the following lines:

"To praise thee, O Tuis, we've come to this land,
Like an oak among shrubs, over kings thou dost stand.
The honor be ours thy great deeds to rehearse
And claim but a pig skin in pay for our verse.
Two neighbors shall war with an O to an O;—
A bard unrequited—how dreadful a foe!
Thy bounty shall add to my wealth and thy fame,
And the *imnocta fessa* is all that we claim."

"Your poem would doubtless be thought very good, if one were able to judge of it," said the

Tuis (Tōōsh).

king. "But it is unlike all other poems I have ever heard, and I do not in the least understand its meaning."

"Listen, while I unfold it then," said Brian.

"To praise thee, O Tuis, we've come to this land;
Like an oak among shrubs, over kings thou dost stand."

"This means that as the oak excels all other trees of the forest, so dost thou excel all other kings of the world for greatness, nobility and generosity."

"'Imnocta fessa'—Imnocta means skin; fessa means pig; that is to say, O King, thou hast the skin of a pig which I desire to obtain from thee as a guerdon for my poetry."

"Two neighbors shall war with an O to an O;
A bard unrequited—how dreadful a foe."

"O means an ear; that is to say, O King, thou and I shall be ear to ear fighting with each other for the skin, if thou give it not of thy own free will. And this, O King, is the meaning of my poem."

"Thy poem would have been a very good one,

and I should have given it due meed of praise, if my pig skin had not been mentioned in it. It is a foolish request of thine, O Ferdana, for even if all the poets and men of science in Eire, and in the whole world beside, were to demand that skin from me I would refuse it. Nevertheless," continued the king, "thou shalt not pass unrewarded, for I will give thee thrice the full of the skin of red gold: one portion for thyself, and one for each of thy brothers."

"Thy ransom is a good one, O King," said Brian, "but I am a near-hearted and suspicious man, and I pray thee let me see with my own eyes thy servants measure the gold; lest they deal unfairly with me."

The king granted his request, and the three sons of Tuireann went with the servants to the treasure room.

But no sooner had they begun to measure the gold, than Brian, suddenly sprang toward them. He dashed them fiercely to the ground; and snatching the pig skin bound it hastily over his shoulders.

Then the three sons of Tuireann drew their keen swords and rushed into the banquet hall. The king's nobles seeing how matters stood, sur-

rounded and attacked them. But the sons of Tuireann, nothing daunted by the number of their foes, hewed down the foremost and scattered the rest.

Scarcely one of the party escaped death or deadly wounds. At last Brian and the King met face to face and fought as great champions fight; fought until the king of Greece fell by the overpowering valor of the sons of Tuireann.

After the victory the three brothers rested in the palace, and healed their wounds by means of the apples and the pig-skin.

At the end of three days and three nights they started on their next adventure.

They went on board the canoe, and soon left behind them the lovely shores of Greece. Across the wide seas they swiftly sped, and finally landed near the palace of Pezar, king of the East.

Having fared so well in their last undertaking, they resolved to put on the guise of poets this time also.

They tied their hair in the poet's knot; and, passing through the outer gate, knocked at the door of the palace.

The door-keeper asked who they were; and from what country they had come.

"We are poets from Eire," answered Brian, "and we have brought a poem for the king."

The door-keeper admitted them, and they were conducted to the presence of the king. The king welcomed them and seated them among the nobles of his household. They joined in the revelry of the banquet hall, and when the proper time came, the king's poets arose and chanted their songs.

After all the poems had been rehearsed, and the sounds of applause had ceased, Brian arose. The king and nobles seeing him were silent and listened while he recited his poem:

"In royal state may Pezar ever reign;
Like some vast yew tree monarch of the plain.
May Pezar's mystic javelin, long and bright,
Bring slaughter to his foes in every fight.

When Pezar fights and shakes his dreadful spear,
Whole armies fly; and heroes quake with fear.
What shielded foe, what champion can withstand
The blazing spear in mighty Pezar's hand!"

"Your poem is a good one," said the king, "but why do you make mention of my spear, without having first obtained permission of me? Were

you not aware that it is not permitted to even the greatest in my kingdom to speak of my spear, unless I have first given him the privilege?"

"This I knew not, O Pezar, and thy telling it hath but increased the ardor of the wish which hath inspired my song. For I desire thy blazing spear, O Pezar, as a reward for my poem."

"Your wish is a very foolish one," said the king. "No man ever escaped punishment if he asked me for my spear. The highest reward I could now grant you, and the greatest favor these nobles could now obtain for you, is that I should spare your life."

Thereupon, Brian and his brothers started up in great wrath and drew their swords. In like manner, the king and his nobles drew their swords, and they fought a deadly fight. But Brian in the midst of the combat, drawing forth one of his apples, cast it at the king, and he fell pierced through the brain.

Then the frightened nobles fled, until no one remained in the banquet hall but the sons of Tuireann. They searched the palace for the room where the spear was kept. At last they found it with its head down deep in a great caldron of water which hissed and bubbled

around it. Brian, seizing it boldly in his hand, drew it forth. Then the three brothers left the palace and went to their canoe. There they rejoiced together, because they had now succeeded in securing three parts of the eric-fine.

After resting some days, they set out to seek for the steeds and the chariot of the King of Segar, for this was the next part of the Ildana's eric fine.

Obedient to their command, the canoe glided rapidly and smoothly over the green waves. At last they landed on the wished-for shore; and then Brian said: "In what shape, think you, should we go to this court?"

"Let us go," said the others, "in our own shapes, as three hostile champions, who have come to get the chariot and steeds either by force or by good will."

"That is not what seems best to me," said Brian. "My council is that we go as soldiers from Eire, willing to serve for pay. Then, should the king take us into his service, it is likely we shall find out where the chariot and the steeds are kept."

So, forthwith, as soldiers from Eire they went to the palace.

There the king was holding a fair-meeting on the broad, level green of the palace park. When the three warriors came near, the people made way for them. They bowed low to the king; and he asked them who they were and from what part of the world they had come.

"We are valiant soldiers from Eire," they answered, "seeking service and pay among the great kings of the world."

"Do you wish to enter my service?" asked the king.

"It is with that desire we have come to Segar," said they.

So they made a covenant with each other: The king to place them in a post of honor and trust. They to serve him faithfully and to name their own reward.

They were placed in the ranks of King Dobar's body-guard. For a month and a fortnight they remained in the palace, looking around, and carefully noting everything. However, they saw nothing of the chariot and the steeds.

At the end of the fortnight, Brian said to his brothers: "It fares ill with us here, my brothers, for we know no more about the chariot and steeds than we did the day we first came thither.

Let us put on our travelling array and take our arms of valor in our hands. In this fashion, let us go before the king, and tell him that unless he shows us the chariot and steeds we shall leave his service."

This they did without delay.

When they were come before the king, he asked them why they had come into his presence thus armed and in travelling guise.

"Of that we have come to tell thee, O king," answered Brian. "Heretofore the kings whom we have served have trusted us with their secret councils. We have been made the guardians of their rarest jewels, and of gifted arms of victory. But thou, O king, hast not even shown us thy chariot and steeds, which we have heard exceed in magnificence all the chariots and steeds in the world."

"A small thing it is that has caused you to prepare for departure," said the king, "and there is, moreover, no need that you should leave my service. You shall see the steeds this very day; and you should have seen them before had I known of your desire, for I have never had in my service more trustworthy soldiers."

The king then sent for the steeds and had them

yoked to the chariot. Those steeds that were as fleet as the clear, cold wind of March, and that traveled with equal speed on land and on sea!

Brian, viewing them narrowly, said: "Hear me, O King of Segar! We have served thee faithfully up to this time, and now we wish to name our own pay, according to the covenant thou hast made with us. The guerdon we demand is yonder chariot and steeds. Give us these and we shall ask for nothing more."

But the king in great wrath, said: "Foolish and luckless men, ye shall certainly die because ye have asked for my steeds."

The king and his warriors then drew their swords and rushed toward the sons of Tuireann, thinking to seize them. The attack was expected and a sore fight began. Suddenly, Brian sprang with a bound into the chariot and, dashing the charioteer to the ground, seized the reins in his left hand. Then, raising the venomed spear of Pezar in his right, he smote the king with its fiery point, so that he fell to the ground and expired. And when the red slaughter of the fight was over, there was no one left to dispute with the three brothers the possession of the chariot.

Ur and Urcar asked where they should go next.

"We shall go" said Brian, "to Asal, the king of the Golden Pillars to ask for his seven pigs; for this is the next part of the eric-fine."

Therewith they started. As they drew near to the land of the Golden Pillars they saw that the shore was lined with men all armed, for the fame of the deeds of the great champions of Eire was being noised abroad through many lands: How they had been forced to leave Eire by the hard sentence of the Ildana, and how they were seeking and bearing away the most precious things of all the world's kingdoms to pay the Ildana's eric-fine.

On account of these reports, the king of the Golden Pillars had armed his people; and had sent them to guard the harbors.

The king himself came down to the beach to meet them. As soon as they were come within speaking distance, he bade them stay their course. Then he asked in angry tones if they were the three champions from Eire; they who had overcome and slain so many kings.

Brian answered: "Be not displeased with us, O king, for in all this matter we are not to blame.

We must pay the eric-fine promised to the Ildana. If the kings to whom he sent us had given us peaceably the precious things we demanded, we would have departed always in the same good will as that in which we came. But, meeting ill will and opposition, we have been compelled to fight for the attainment of our end. Unwillingly, indeed, have we fought, yet none so far have been able to withstand us."

"Tell me now" said the king, "What has brought you to our country?"

"We have come for thy seven pigs" said Brian, "for they are a part of our fine. Thou perchance wilt have pity on our hardships, and give us these pigs in token of kindness and friendship and not compel us to fetch them away by force."

On hearing this, the king and his people went into council. After debating the matter, they thought best to give the pigs peaceably, for they feared they might not be able to resist the power of the sons of Tuireann.

So the king invited the three champions to his palace. They ate and drank and slept on downy beds. When they arose the next morning, they were brought into the king's presence, and the pigs were given them. Then Brian, bow-

ing low before the king spoke these words:

“Thanks for the guerdon thou hast given,
Great king of Sicily;
Thy welcome unto Tuireann’s sons
Shall long remembered be.
And when our deeds in happier days
Shall bring us praise and fame
In Eire green shall poet lays
Commemorate thy name.”

“Whither go ye next, ye sons of Tuireann?”
asked Asal.

“We go,” answered Brian, “into Iroda, for
Failinis, the king’s hound whelp.”

“My daughter is the king’s wife,” said Asal,
“and I will go with you to Iroda, and may be able
to persuade him for her sake to give you the
hound whelp freely and without battle.”

“It gives me joy, O King, to accept your prof-
fered aid, for often in the struggles which I have
had heretofore in the quest for the eric-fine, I
have wished for the help of a strong and friendly
hand.”

King Asal wished the journey to be made in
his own ship; so he commanded his soldiers to
get it ready. Then all went on board, taking
with them much wealth.

And it is not told how they fared until they reached the kingdom of Iroda.

When they arrived, the shores were lined with fierce, armed men, who were there by order of the king to guard the harbor. These men shouted to the crew of Asal's ships a warning to come no further. They well knew it could be no other than the sons of Tuireann, bent on acquiring that part of their eric-fine which was the property of the king of Iroda.

"Stay here for a while and await my return," said King Asal, to the sons of Tuireann. "It is best that I should go on shore alone and meet my son-in-law."

Accordingly he landed and went to the king, who, after he had welcomed him, asked what had brought the sons of Tuireann to his country.

"They have come for your hound whelp," answered King Asal, "and I beg you to give it freely and without battle."

"It was an evil council you followed when you came with these men to my shores," said the king, "for no champions in all the world have ever received from the gods strength and favor sufficient to enable them to obtain possession of

my hound whelp either by force or by my own free will."

"It will be unwise of you to refuse them," replied King Asal. "They have gifted arms, that no warrior, however powerful, can withstand. Numbers nor power can daunt them; and, having your welfare at heart, I have come thither to advise you to give them your hound whelp in peace."

But King Asal's words were only thrown away on the king of Iroda and he angrily refused Asal's request, and spoke with scornful words of the sons of Tuireann.

Asal, very much troubled because of the result of his talk with the king of Iroda, returned to the ship where the sons of Tuireann were anxiously awaiting him.

When they heard how matters stood, without delay they put on their battle dress; and, taking their arms in their hands, challenged the king of Iroda and his people.

Then began a fierce and bloody battle. Though nothing could stand before the sons of Tuireann, yet the warriors of Iroda were many and very brave.

During the course of the fight, the two younger

brothers became separated from Brian, and he was completely surrounded by hostile champions. But, when he wielded the blazing spear of Pezar with its deadly point, his foes fled before him. Well they knew it would be useless to resist the venom of that dreadful spear.

At length, Brian spied the king of Iroda. Bravely he was fighting; hedged round-a-bout by shining spears.

Brian rushed through the thick of the battle straight toward him, striking down spears and swords and men as he went. The king saw him coming, and commanded his men to fall back. Then he and Brian fought like valiant warriors hand to hand. Powerful, alert and fierce were both, and it was long before any advantage was gained on either side.

Brian seemed the more wrathful of the two; yet he held back his hand, for he sought to tire out his foe, not to slay him. The end of it all was that Brian succeeded in seizing the king in his strong arms. He lifted him off the ground and bore him to where Asal stood. Then setting him down he said: "Behold thy son-in-law. It would have been easier three times over to have

killed him than to have brought him to thee alive."

When the people saw their king a prisoner, they ceased fighting and peace was made. Also, the hound whelp was given over to the sons of Tuireann. They then took their leave and sailed away from the shores of Iroda in peace and friendship with the King; and with Asal, his father-in-law.

Meanwhile the Ildana was preparing for another battle with the Fomorians; a battle which should be known as the second battle of Magh Tuireadh.

The great Leech, Diancecht; the skillful smith, Goibnu; the Dagda and Ogma,—these were the ones who met secretly with the Ildana to prepare the plan of battle. They left nothing undone which might help them to a victory over their strong and vengeful foe.

By this time, Ku and Kethen, the sons of Canta had returned. With them came the Fairy Host, which they had marshalled together from everywhere in Eire.

But one thing more remained to be done: It had been revealed to Lugha, the Ildana, that the sons of Tuireann had now obtained all those

Diancecht [Dēē'yān Kā'yächt]. Goibnu [Goin' [coin] yu]. Dagda [Daw' dāh]. Ogma [Ō'ma]: gods of the Tuatha De Danann, the chief of whom was the Dagda.

parts of the eric-fine which he deemed necessary to insure success in the approaching conflict.

So he sent after them a druidical spell, which caused them, soon after they left Iroda, to forget the cooking spit and the three shouts on Midkena's hill, and filled them with great longing to return to their native home.

Accordingly, they set sail without delay for the shores of Eire, taking with them the parts of the fine which they had already secured.

CHAPTER IV.

Now it happened that the Ildana was with the king at a fair meeting on the plain before Teamhair. And it was made known to him secretly that the sons of Tuireann had landed at Bruga of the Boyne.

He left the assembly, telling none, and went directly to the fortress of Rath-ree; and, closing the gates and doors after himself, he put on the smooth, Greek armor of Manannan MacLir and the enchanted mantle of Flidas.

Soon after this the sons of Tuireann were seen approaching. The multitude which was gathered together at the fair-meeting flocked out to greet them, and gazed with wonder at the many marvelous things they had brought.

When they had come to the royal tent, the king joyfully welcomed them, and asked them if they had brought the eric-fine.

"We have obtained it after much hardship and danger, O King," said they, "and now we wish to know where Lugha is that we may deliver it to him."

The king told them that the Ildana was at the

assembly; but, though they searched everywhere for him, he could not be found.

"I can surmise where he is," said Brian, "It has been made known to him that we have come to Eire, bringing with us charmed, gifted weapons that none can withstand, and he has gone to one of the strongholds of Teamhair to avoid us, fearing that we might use them against himself."

Messengers were then sent to the Ildana to tell him that the sons of Tuireann had arrived, and to ask him to come to the meeting, in order that they might give him the fine.

But the Ildana said to the messengers: "I will not go to the meeting yet awhile; but go ye back and tell the sons of Tuireann to give the fine to the king for me."

When the messenger returned with this answer, the sons of Tuireann gave into the keeping of the king all the wonderful things they had collected in their journeys. After this the entire company went into the palace, and in a little while Lugha, the Ildana, having heard how matters stood, came also and the king gave him the fine.

Lugha looked narrowly at everything that had

been given up to him and said: "Here, indeed, is an eric-fine sufficient to pay for any one that ever yet was slain; or, that shall be slain until the end of time! Yet, there is one kind of fine that must be paid to the last farthing, namely: an eric-fine—for it is not lawful to hold back even the smallest part. And, moreover, O King, thou and the Dedannans whom I see here present are guarantees for the full payment of my eric-fine." Again Lugha looked narrowly at the wonderful things which had been brought to him from many lands, and said he: "I see here the three apples; and the skin of the pig; and the fiery headed spear; and the chariot and steeds; and the seven pigs and the hound whelp. But where, ye sons of Tuireann, is the cooking spit of the women of Fincara? And I have not heard that ye have given the three shouts on Midkenna's hill."

On hearing this, the sons of Tuireann fell into a faintness, like unto the faintness before death, and when they had recovered they answered not one word; but left the assembly and went to their father's house.

To their father and to their sister Eithne they told all that had befallen them. And how now

they must set out upon another quest because through the spells of Lughá they had forgotten two parts of the éric-fine.

On hearing this Tuireann was overwhelmed with grief and wept in great fear and sorrow.

The next morning, when the point of night met day, Brian, Ur and Urcar accompanied by their father and Eithne stood by the shore from which they were once more to sail.

When their farewells were spoken, they embarked, determined never to return, unless bringing with them the two forgotten parts of the fine.

It was no longer their privilege to use Manannan's canoe. In their own slower sailing, less commodious—yet trustworthy ship they set sail and sped forth over the green, billowy sea, in search of the island of Fincara.

For four full moons they wandered hither and thither; sailing with the billows; and against them. On many shores they landed and inquired of all they met; yet, they were unable to get the least tidings of the island where the war-like women dwelt.

At last they met a very old man, who told them that he had heard of the island of Fincara in the days of his youth. He said it lay not on

the surface; but down deep in the waters, for it was sunk beneath the waves, by a druidical spell, in times long past.

Then Brian put on his water dress, with his helmet of transparent crystal on his head. Telling his brothers to await his return, he leaped over the side of the ship; and sank at once out of sight.

He walked about for a fortnight down in the green, salt sea, before he found the island of Fincara.

He noticed that among many houses on the island, one was larger and grander than the rest. Straightway, he bent his steps toward this; and finding it open entered.

In a large apartment, hung with gorgeous tapestries, he saw a great number of beautiful ladies busily employed at all sorts of embroidery and needle work: and in their midst was a long, bright cooking spit, lying on a table.

Without speaking a word, he walked straight to the table; and, seizing the spit in one hand, walked toward the door. The women neither spoke nor moved. But each one had her eyes fixed upon him from the moment he entered; ad-

miring his manly form, his beauty and his fearlessness.

But when they saw him about to walk off with the spit, they all burst out laughing! One, who seemed the chief among them said: "Thou hast attempted a bold deed, O son of Tuireann. Dost thou not know that there are thrice fifty war-like women here? Dost thou not know that the weakest among us would be able of herself alone to prevent thee taking this cooking spit—even if thy brothers were here to help thee?"

"Thou art a brave and noble champion; else, thou wouldst not have attempted to take the spit by force and without the help of anyone, for the danger is not unknown to thee. So, for thy boldness and valor, and for the comeliness of thy person, we will let thee take this one for we have many others beside."

It was with great joy that Brian listened to these words. Thanking the women of Fincara, he took the spit and hastened to find his ship.

Ur and Urcar had remained in the same spot waiting for Brian. As day after day went by and he came not, they began to fear that he would never return. They were about to leave the place, having given up all hope, when down

deep in the water they saw the glitter of Brian's crystal helmet. A moment afterward, he arose to the surface with the cooking spit in his hand.

His brothers helped him on board and they all rejoiced together over his success.

Then they sailed away toward the north of Lochlann, and never abated speed until they had moored their vessel near the hill of Midkena.

From its smooth, green height, Midkena saw them approaching.

He knew them at a glance, and coming toward them, armed for battle, spoke to them in loud and threatening tones: "You it was who slew Kian, my friend and pupil, and now come hither and fight, for you shall not leave these shores until you answer for his death."

Brian, in no wise daunted by the fierce look and angry speech of Midkena, sprang ashore and the two heroes attacked each other with great fury.

The three sons of Midkena heard the clash of arms, and rushed forth to aid their father. But just as they arrived at the shore Midkena fell dead, cloven through the helmet by the heavy sword of Brian.

Now began a fight, three on each side.

And if men were afar off, even in the land of Hisberna, at the western end of the world, they would willingly come the whole way to see this battle. So fierce and haughty were the minds of those mighty champions; so skillful and active were they in the use of their weapons; so numerous and heavy were their blows; and so long did they continue to fight without either party giving way, that the most valiant of warriors must have looked on with admiration.

The three sons of Tuireann were at last dreadfully wounded; wounded almost to death. But, neither fear nor weakness did this cause them. The more they were wounded, the more their valor and their fury arose, and with one mighty onset they drove their spears through the bodies of their foes.

And the sons of Midkena fell before them into the long sleep of death.

When the fight was ended, and the battle fury gave place to calm within the breasts of the victors, they began to feel the direful effects of their wounds. They threw themselves full length on the blood-stained sward; and it was as if they were dead, for a heavy curtain of darkness fell

over their eyes. And thus they remained without moving or speaking.

Then Brian called to his brothers for he sought to know if they still lived.

They answered him feebly, and he said: "My dear brothers, let us now arise and give the three shouts on the hill, while yet there is time; for I feel the signs of death."

Then Brian exerting himself to the utmost, and disregarding the blood which flowed copiously from his wounds, stood up and giving a hand to each of his brothers enabled them to rise.

The three sons of Tuireann then gave, though feebly, the three shouts that Lugha required of them.

Without further delay they sailed for Eire.

While they were yet far off, Brian gazing over the sea toward the west, suddenly cried out: "Lo, I see yonder Ben Edar, rising above the waters. And I see also Dun Tuireann toward the north."

Then Urcar spoke from where he reclined with Ur upon the deck: "If we could but get one glance of Ben Edar, methinks we should regain our health and strength. As thou lovest us, and as thou lovest thine own renown, my brother, come and raise our heads and rest them on thy

breast, so that we may see Eire once more. After that we shall welcome either life or death.

“Let us, once more, behold our father’s home;
On winding Liffey, down by Athaclee.
Old Frevin’s hill; or Teamhair’s regal dome;—
Then welcome life or death, which’er may be.”

So Brian raised their heads and rested them on his breast, and they gazed on the rocky cliffs and green slopes of Ben Edar, while the ship was wafted slowly toward the shore.

Soon they landed near the northern side of Ben Edar, and from there made their way, little by little, to Dun Tuireann. When they had reached the green in front of the house, Brian cried out: “Father, dear father, come forth to thy children.”

Tuireann came and saw his sons, all wounded and pale and feeble, and his heart was filled with sorrow. Brian after greting him said: “Go, beloved father, go quickly to Teamhair; and as quickly return. Fetch this cooking spit to Lugha, and tell him that we have given the three shouts on Midkena’s hill. Say that we have now paid the entire eric-fine and bring from him the apples

Athaclee [Aʷhʰəw clēē]: Ford of the Hurdles; present city of Dublin.

Frevin [Fra’win]: Hill in Westmeath on the west shore of Loch Owel. Here, in the ninth century resided Turgesius, the Danish tyrant who met death by drowning in the above mentioned Loch.

from the garden of Hisberna to heal our wounds; else we die."

"Alas, my children," said Tuireann, "I know the stern Ildana's mind. Far rather would he see you in your tomb, than that he should possess all the treasures this great world can show."

"Oh, father," then said Brian, "linger not here to mourn; go straight to Luga's home. Tell him we pay full eric for his parent's death. Is not the great Ildana just? Speed like the wind, nor tarry long, lest we die before thou return."

Tuireann set out and traveled like the wind, until he reached Téamhair. There he found Luga. He gave him the cooking spit and said: "Behold, O Ildana, my three sons have now paid to thee full eric fine, for they have given the three shouts on Midkena's hill. But they are wounded unto death; and now give me, I pray thee, the three apples from the garden of Hisberna to cure them; else will they die."

"In vain dost thou seek to restore thy sons, O Tuireann; they committed a wicked and pitiful deed when they slew my father, and nothing could avert their punishment."

"For the blood they have spilled,
For the hero they have killed,
The penalty is paid and the doom is fulfilled."

“Return, O Tuireann, to thy home; take with thee the apples if thou wilt; yet powerless their magic, and powerless all human effort in behalf of those who, ere your request was made, lay cold as did their victim on Murthemna’s plain.” Heavy was Tuireann’s heart as he set out from Teamhair, knowing full well he never again should hear the voices of his sons.

Eithne, her golden hair unbound about her shoulders, her dark eyes dim with weeping, met him at the gateway of Dun Tuireann. With her he hastened to where Brian lay with Ur and Urcar on either side of him; for, together they departed this life. Lamenting over their lifeless forms, father and sister stood hand in hand, while Tuireann spoke this lay:

O pulseless is my heart this woful hour ;

My strength is gone, my joy forever fled ;

Three noble champions, Eire’s pride and power,

My three fair youths, my children, cold and dead !

Lo, hear ye Tuireann, your unhappy sire,

Mourning with feeble voice above your grave !

Not wealth nor life nor honors I desire ;

A place beside my sons is all I crave.

After this lamentation, Tuireann and Eithne fell on the bodies of the three young heroes and they were all buried in one grave,

The Fate of the Children of Lir

CHAPTER I.



IR AND AILBE lived in a beautiful palace called Sidhe Finneachaidh. They had four children whose names were Finula, Aodh, Fiachra and Conn. Their mother Ailbe was the daughter of Oilell Arann; and foster child of Bove Derg, the king. While the children were still very young their mother died. Their father Lir loved Ailbe and her death caused him great anguish; indeed, he too would have died of grief, were it not that his mind was turned from his sorrow by his love for his four little motherless children.

When the time of mourning for Ailbe was over, Bove Derg, the King said: "We mourn with you, O Lir, for our foster child and, lest the bond of alliance and friendship existing between us on her account should be broken, I will give you for a wife Ailbe's sister, Aoife."

Lir [Lēer] Ailbe [Awl'väh]. Sidhe Finneachaidh [Shē Fin ä' hä]
Aodh [Ä]. Oilell Arann [Äwl'yēel Äh'rän]. Aoife [Ē'fä].

So Lir, glad with the thought that Aoife would give a mother's loving care to his little ones, went to the palace of Bove Derg and espoused her and brought her back with him to Sidhe Finneachaidh.

At first Aoife was a very kind stepmother to Finula, Aodh, Fiachra and Conn and seemed to love them almost as much as did their father Lir. Every one loved them; even Bove Derg, the King, went many times a year to Sidhe Finneachaidh to visit them, and he often brought them to his palace and was always sorry when the time came for their return home, it gave him such pleasure to have them with him.

It was the custom of the Dedannans to celebrate the feast of age at the houses of the different chiefs in turn; and whenever the festival happened to be held at Sidhe Finneachaidh the stepchildren of Aoife were the delight and joy of all the Dedannans, so gentle and beautiful were they. This should have pleased Aoife; but instead, when she saw the children of Lir receive such attention from their father and from all the people who came to his house, she fancied that she was neglected on their account and bitter jealousy entered her heart and turned her love into hatred.

For a whole year Aoife plotted against the children, and planned to rid herself of them. Then, one day, she ordered her horses yoked to her chariot, and she set out for the palace of Bove Derg, taking the children with her. Finula did not wish to go, for she had dreamed that Aoife was about to bring some harm upon herself and her brothers. But she was unable to avoid the fate that awaited her.

As they were passing through a dark and lonely wood on their way to the palace, Aoife said to her attendants: "It is my desire that these children be destroyed, and it is for this I have brought them with me. I cannot endure to have them live any longer, for their father has neglected and forsaken me on account of his great love for them." But the attendants listened with horror to Aoife and said: "The children of Lir shall never be harmed by us; fearful is the deed thou hast contemplated, Aoife, and evil will surely befall thee for having even thought of destroying these beautiful children entrusted to thy care."

And so they continued on their way; the wicked Aoife still plotting mischief in her heart. At last they came to the shores of Lake Darvra; and then Aoife commanded the attendants to unyoke the

horses and let them rest. She alighted with the children from the chariot and led them to the edge of the lake and bade them go and bathe. One by one as they entered the pure, limpid water, she struck them with a druidical, fairy wand and turned them into four beautiful snow-white swans. Waving the mystical wand she said:

“The words of doom are spoken;
Your home is now the wave;
The charm cannot be broken,
From fate no power can save.”

When she had ceased speaking the four children of Lir turned their faces toward her and Finula said: “Thou hast ruined us without a cause; false has thy friendship been, and evil is the deed which thou hast done; but we will be avenged and the doom that awaits thee is worse than ours.”

“At last thy wicked work is done!
Aoife, false and cruel one,
With fairy wand and fearful words
To change us into snow-white birds!
Upon the waters evermore
To sail and sail from shore to shore!”

Aoife answered them: "Three hundred years on Darvra's lake; three hundred more on the sea of Moyle; and on the sea of Glora in the west three hundred years; until the union of the prince of the north with the princess of the south; until the Taillkenn come and the voice of the Christian bell is heard in Eire; and there is no power can free you until thrice three hundred years be past!"

But no sooner had she finished speaking than she was sorry for what she had done. The fairy wand dropped from her hands as she stretched them out toward the snow-white swans and said: "O children of Lir, since I may not now afford you any other relief, I shall allow you to keep your own sweet, Gaelic speech; and you shall be able to sing plaintive, fairy music; melodies more beautiful than any the world has ever listened to, and all who hear them shall be lulled to sleep. Moreover you shall retain your human reason, and your lives shall be preserved until the time comes for you to resume again your human form." And then she chanted:

"Until thrice three hundred years are gone,

You shall keep the form of snow white swan;

Your palace shall be the pearly cave

Moyle; Gaelic: *Sruth na Maoile* [*Sruh na Mwēel'äh*]: Sea between Eire and Alban. Sea of Glora is off west coast of Mayo. Taillkenn [*Täl'ken*]: A prophesied Deliverer—Saint Patrick.

Your couch the crest of the crystal wave.
And though Lir shall call his loved ones long
His only answer shall be the song
Of white swans under the night star pale
Singing together a mournful tale."

Then she ordered her steeds yoked to her chariot and departed westward, leaving the four white swans swimming upon the lake.

CHAPTER II.

When Aoife arrived at the palace, the chiefs bade her welcome; and Bove Derg, the King, asked her why she had not brought the children of Lir with her. "Because," she replied, "Lir no longer loves thee, and he does not wish to intrust his children to thee, lest thou shouldst harm them."

The king was greatly astonished and troubled to hear this, and he said: "This cannot be; Lir knows that I love those children as dearly as I love my own."

He could not help thinking that Aoife had been guilty of some treachery; so he sent messengers in haste to Sidhe Finneachaidh to ask about the children and request that they might be sent to him.

When Lir heard the message from Bove Derg his heart was very sad, for he felt sure that Aoife had destroyed his four lovely children. Early next morning his chariot was yoked for him and he set out with his attendants for the king's palace; and they traveled with great speed until they arrived at the shore of lake Darvra. The children

of Lir saw the cavalcade approaching, and Finula chanted these words:

“I see the shields and gilded mail
Of warriors coming down the vale.
I see their chariots advance,
While swords and helmets brightly glance.
Too well I know what brings them here:
This Dinnan host and royal Lir.”

When Lir reached the shore he heard the birds speaking and wondering greatly he asked them how it came to pass that they had human voices.

“O father Lir,” said Finula, “we are thy four children, and the jealousy of Aoife has caused her to turn us into birds.” When Lir and his people heard this they uttered three long cries of grief and lamentation, and after some time passed in silence Lir said: “Alas, dear children, great is my sorrow to find you thus; yet I hope it is possible to restore to you your human forms, and this I shall seek to do without delay.”

But the swans answered him: “There is no power, O Lir, can break the spell of the druidical charm by which Aoife has changed thy children into snow-white swans. For three times three centuries we must sail the waves of Dar-

vra, Moyle and Glora. We may not take our human shapes again until the union of the prince of the north with the princess of the south; and until the Tailkenn has come and the sound of the Christian bell is heard in Eire." Hearing this the people again raised three great cries of sorrow.

Then Finula spoke again: "But the wicked Aoife has allowed us to retain our Gaelic speech; and we have also the power to chant plaintive, fairy music; so sweet that those who listen to us could not wish for any greater happiness. Remain on Darvra shore tonight and we will chant for you."

So Lir and his people remained on the shore of the lake, and the swans sang their fairy music for them; and it was so sweet and sad that the people as they listened fell into a calm, gentle sleep.

At the first glimmer of dawn, Lir arose and bade his children farewell:

"The time has come for us to part
No more, alas, my children dear,
Your rosy smiles shall glad the heart
Or light the gloomy home of Lir."

Then Lir went to seek Aoife and when he had come to the king's palace, Bove Derg reproached

him in the presence of Aoife for not bringing the children.

“Alas!” said Lir, “It was not I but your own foster child, Aoife, who prevented them from coming. She has placed them under cruel spells; and changed them by her sorcery into four white swans on the lake of Darvra.”

The king listened with astonishment to this sad news, and when he looked at Aoife he knew by her countenance that Lir had told him the truth. In fierce and angry tones he spoke to her and said: “Thy cruel deed shall be worse for thee than for the children, for there shall be an end to their sufferings but not to yours.” And still more fiercely he spoke and asked her what form of all upon the earth, or above the earth, or beneath the earth she most abhorred; and she answered: “A demon of the air.”

“That is the form you now shall take,” said Bove Derg and as he spoke he struck her with a druidical, magic wand and turned her into a demon of the air. She opened her wings and flew with a scream upward and away through the clouds. And she is still a demon of the air, and shall be until the end of time.

After this Bove Derg and the Dedannans went

Demon of the air: Gaelic: Deamhan Aedhir [Dune Ār]. Milesian:
 Same as Phœnician; the people of Milè, the last of the ancient colon-
 ists of Eire; they came from Spain; but, first from the East Milè;
 Latin Miletus, a soldier.

to the shore of lake Darvra where they encamped, and the Milesian people came also and encamped in like manner. For three hundred years the people in their encampments, and the swans on the lake conversed together sweetly during the day, and at night the swans chanted their fairy music; the most delightful that was ever heard by men. And all who listened to this music forgot their grief and pain and fell into a gentle sleep, from which they awoke bright and happy.

At the end of the three hundred years, Finula said to her brothers: "Do you not know, my dear brothers, we have come to the end of our time here, and have but this one more night to spend on lake Darvra?"

When the three sons of Lir heard this they were very sorrowful, for now they must bid their father and their friends farewell and go to live on the dismal, tempestuous sea of Moyle far away from all human society. Early the next morning they came to the margin of the lake to say farewell and Finula chanted this lay:

"Our father dear and friends farewell,
The last sad hour is near;
On stormy Moyle we go to dwell
In loneliness and fear."

The four swans then spread their wings and rose from the surface of the water in sight of all their friends until they had reached a great height in the air. Then resting and looking downward for a moment they flew to the north, and alighted on the sea of Moyle between Eire and Alban. With sad hearts the people watched their snowy wings disappear in the far, blue heaven; and immediately thereafter they made a law, and proclaimed it throughout the land, that from that time forth no one should kill a swan in Eire.

Miserable indeed was the plight of the children of Lir on the sea of Moyle. The sight of the dark, wild waves and steep, rocky coast filled them with fear and despair; and not only were they sad and lonely, but they were also cold and hungry.

And so they lived until one night a great tempest fell upon the sea. Finula when she saw the sky darkening over with great rolling clouds, said to her brothers: "Beloved brothers, we have made no preparations for this night, and it is certain that the coming storm will separate us; let us now appoint a place of meeting or it may happen that we may never see each other again."

"Dear sister," they answered, "you speak truly and wisely. Let us arrange to meet at Carrick-

narone as that is a rock we all know very well." So they appointed Carricknarone for a meeting place.

At midnight a wild, rough wind swept over the dark sea; the lightnings flashed, and the roar of the great billows was almost as loud as the thunders of the sky. The unhappy swans were scattered over the waters so that not one of them knew in what direction the others had been driven. Toward morning the storm abated and Finula swam to Carricknarone, but she did not find her brothers there; neither could she see any trace of them when, from the summit of the rock, she looked all around over the wide face of the sea. She feared she might never again see her brothers, and began to lament them singing:

"The anguish and woe of this life

No longer I'm able to bear.

My wings are benumbed with the pitiless frost;

My three little brothers are scattered and lost
And I am left here to despair.

Return, O my brothers, return!

Sail over the dark waves to me.

Once more let me shelter you close to my breast,
And soothe all your sorrows and lull you to rest;

Return, O my brothers, to me."

But hardly had she ceased singing, when she saw Conn coming toward the rock with his head drooping, and his feathers all drenched with the salt spray. With joyful heart she welcomed him, and together they anxiously scanned the waters in hope of seeing their brothers. Soon Fiachra came so faint, after his long struggle against the stormy waves, that he was hardly able to answer the affectionate greetings of his brother and sister. Finula spread her wings over him and Conn and said: "If Aodh were here now how happy we would all be!" And how happy they were a short time afterward to see him coming with head erect and feathers dry and radiant.

Many another tempest the children of Lir lived through upon the briny waters of the sea of Moyle. Sometimes they visited the shores of Eire and the headlands of Alban; but they could remain away for only a short period of time, as the fetters of the fairy charm bound them to return again to the sea stream of Moyle. One day they came to the mouth of the Bann, on the north coast of Eire, and looking inland they saw a troop of horsemen coming from the southwest. They were mounted on white steeds and clad in bright col-

ored garments; and as they moved toward the shore their arms glittered in the sunlight.

The swans swam toward the shore in order to find out who the strangers were. It happened also that the cavalcade espied the swans and directed their course toward them, until they were within speaking distance. These mounted men were a third part of the Fairy Host and were commanded by the two sons of Bove Derg: Aed, the keen witted; and Fergus, the chess player. They had been searching for the children of Lir along the northern shores of Eire, and they were very joyful when they found them. Tender words of greeting were exchanged by them and the snow white swans, and the chiefs gave to the unhappy children of Lir tidings of their father and their friends. But soon they bade each other farewell, for the swans could not remain longer away from Moyle. As the fairy cavalcade moved away they heard the sweet, sad voice of Finula chanting:

“Ah, happy is Lir’s bright home today,
With mead and music and poet’s lay;
But gloomy and cold his children roam
Forever tossed on the briny foam.
On Moyle’s dark current our food and wine

Are sandy sea weed and bitter brine.
Lonely we swim on the billowy main
Through frost and snow; through storm and rain;
But rich was our raiment, long, long ago;
Mantles of purple and furs of snow;
And gaily we feasted in days of old
And drank sweet nectar from cups of gold."

As soon as the Fairy Host had returned to Sidhe Finneachaidh they related all that had happened, and described the condition of the children of Lir. Then the Dedannan chiefs said: "We would gladly help them were it in our power, but it is not. Still we may find comfort in the thought that the enchantment will at length be broken, and the white swans once more resume their human forms."

When the three hundred years on the sea of Moyle were ended, the swans flew westward to the sea of Glora. And it happened that a young man named Ebric, who lived near the sea, observed the birds and heard their singing. He took great delight in listening to them, and almost every day he walked down to the sea to look at them and converse with them. And they grew to love each other very much; and it was

he who in the old days wrote down the story of the snow-white swans.

The children of Lir sailed, as they were destined to do, for three hundred years on the sea of Glora; and, when at last the time was past, Finula said: "Come brothers, our time upon the seas is over; let us now go to visit our father and our people." How glad the brothers were to hear this! They all spread their snowy wings and rising lightly from the face of the water flew eastward to Sidhe Finneachaidh. But when they alighted, they found the place deserted and solitary. Its halls were ruined and overgrown with rank grass and forests of nettles. All was dark, and lonely, and nowhere was there anything to show that human beings dwelt there.

The four swans drew close together and uttered three loud, mournful cries of sorrow; and Finula sang:

"The house of my father is joyless and lone;
Its halls and its gardens with weeds overgrown.
No warrior noble nor beautiful maid,
In bright silken garments and jewels arrayed.
No shield nor keen sword on the dark lofty walls;
No music to brighten its desolate halls."

All that night the swans sang together mel-

odies so sad and beautiful that the very trees around the deserted palace wept as the strains vibrated through their branches.

CHAPTER III.

Early next morning the children of Lir left Sidhe Finneachaidh and flew westward to a small lake near Innis Glora. They alighted on its waters and began to sing so sweetly that all the birds of the forest near by gathered on the shores to listen; and the little lake came to be known as the lake of the bird-flocks.

During the day the birds used to fly to distant points on the coast in order to find food: now to Achill; now to Inniskea of the lonely crane and sometimes southward to Donn's sea rocks. But every night they returned to Innis Glora. In this manner they lived until the Taillkenn brought the Christian faith to Eire, and Saint Kemoc came to Innis Glora.

When first the swans heard Saint Kemoc ringing his bell at early matin time, they trembled at the strange sound, and did not know whether to be joyful or afraid, until Finula said: "My brothers, this faint, sweet sound we hear is the voice of the Christian bell; and now the end of our suffering is near for with the ringing of this bell comes freedom from Aoife's spell."

"Listen, O swans, to the sound of the bell,
The sweet bell we've dreamed of for many a year,
Its tones floating by on the night breezes tell
That the end of our long day of sorrow is near.

Oh trust in the glorious Lord of the sky;
He will free us from Aoife's magical spell.
Be thankful and glad that our freedom is nigh,
And listen with joy to the sound of the bell."

When Kemoc, the cleric, had finished his matins the swans chanted a low, sweet strain of fairy music in praise of the great high King of heaven and earth. Kemoc heard it and listened with great wonder, and while he listened it was revealed to him that it was the children of Lir whom he had heard singing. So, as soon as it was dawn, he went to the shore of the lake and there he saw the four white swans swimming on the water. "Are you not the children of Lir?" he said to them.

"We are indeed Lir's children," said they. "Long ago we were changed into swans by our jealous stepmother."

"I give God thanks that I have found you," said Kemoc. "It is on your account that I have come to this little island in preference to all other islands in Eire. Come now to land and trust in

me, for it is in this place that you are destined to be freed from your enchantment."

It filled their hearts with joy to hear Kemoc speaking thus, and they swam to shore and placed themselves in his care. He brought them to his own home and, sending for a skilful workman, he directed him to make two bright slender chains of silver and he put one between Finula and Aodh; and one between Fiachra and Conn. And so they lived with him, listening to his instructions, and joining in his devotions. And the holy cleric loved them with all his heart and the memory of all the misery they had suffered caused them neither distress nor sorrow.

At this time Largnen, the son of Colman, was king of Connacht; and, his queen was Decca, daughter of the king of Munster, the same king and queen of whom Aoife had spoken so long before in her prophecy. Queen Decca heard of the wonderful, speaking swans, and their sad story filled her heart with love and sympathy; and she desired very much to have them with her at the royal palace. She besought the king to get them for her, but Largnen said he did not wish to ask them from Kemoc. Decca, however, was determined to have the swans; so she left the palace

that very hour and fled southward toward her father's home.

Largnen, when he found that she was gone, sent messengers after her to say that if she would return he would ask Kemoc for the swans. The messengers overtook her at Killaloe, and she returned with them to the palace, happy with the thought of having the snow white swans for her own.

But Kemoc refused Largnen's request for the birds; and this made him very angry. He set out at once for the cleric's house, and being very wroth he seized the swans and hurried away with them, intending to bring them by force to the queen. He had gone but a little way when the swans' beautiful, white feathers seemed to melt in the air and then entirely vanished; and, although nobody could tell after beholding it how it came to pass, the swans regained their human shapes. But not as children did they appear; on the contrary, they were feeble, white haired and wrinkled.

The king, on beholding them thus, started with affright and instantly left the place without speaking a word. Kemoc, looking after him, reproached him bitterly; but Finula said: "Do not

Largnen [Lärn'yěn].

grieve for us, O Kemoc, but baptize us without delay; for the time is near for our departure from this life. Make our grave on this spot and bury us together. Place us as we have often nestled together when we were swans: Conn standing near me at my right side; Fiachra at my left and Aodh looking into my face. So then the holy cleric, Saint Kemoc, baptized them, and they closed their eyes in the long sleep from which they would never awaken in this world. And Kemoc, looking up, saw a vision of four lovely children, with luminous, silvery, wings and faces radiant with joy. The children smiled at him and then slowly disappeared from his eager gaze.

Kemoc was very happy for he knew the swans had gone to dwell in a kingdom where no treachery could touch them, and where all would be love and happiness.

He buried the bodies of the children of Lir according to their wish; and raised a grave mound over them, and above it a stone on which their names were engraved in Ogham.

And this is the sorrowful story of the children of Lir as told by Ebric of the lake of Glora.

Ogham [Ō'ām]: The most ancient manner of writing or making records known to the Irish. There are many stones inscribed in Ogham still extant.

The Ard Righ of Eire

CHAPTER I.



NE day, as Eochaid Feidlech, Ard Righ of Eire, was going over the fair green of Bri Leith he saw near a well a woman wearing a beautiful, purple cloak with silver fringes and a golden brooch. Her dress was of green silk with a long hood embroidered in red gold, and on her breast and shoulders were cunningly wrought clasps of gold and silver. Her hair was in two plaits, and in each plait were four strands, and at the end of each strand was a bead. Also she wore a comb of gold and silver. The color of her hair was like that of the yellow ailestars in summer, or like red gold after it is rubbed.

She had brought with her a silver basin, in which to wash her hair. The basin had four golden birds on it and little, bright-purple stones set in its rim. After preparing to wash her hair she let it down with her soft hands, white as the Ard Righ of Eire [Ard Rēē of Ār'yä]: The High King of Ireland.

The Ard Righ of Eire: The original manuscript is one of the oldest specimens of written Gaelic now extant. Eochaid Feidlech [Ōch'ēē Fāy'läch].

Bri Leith [Brēē Lēh]: Property of Leith. Ailestar [Ä lest är], the iris or fleur de lis.

snow of a single night. Her eyes were blue as any blue flower, and her lips as red as the berries of the quicken tree. The brightness of the moon was in her face; the arch of pride in her eyebrows; a dimple of delight in each of her cheeks; the light of love in her eyes and her walk was that of a queen. Of all the women in the world she was the loveliest and best, and King Eochaid and his people thought that she came from the hills of the Sidhe, and they said of her: "All are dear and all are beautiful until they are put beside Etain."

So Eochaid sent messengers to bring her to him, and when she had come he said "Who are you and where do you come from?"

"That is easy to tell," she said. "I am Etain, daughter of Etar, king of the Riders of the Sidhe. "Ever since I was born, twenty years ago, I have lived in this place. Kings and great men from among the Sidhe have asked for my love, but I have not wasted a thought on them, for even when I was a child I loved you, because of the tales I heard of your goodness and valor. When I saw you just now, I knew you by all I had heard of you and was glad to have found you at last."

"It is a good friend you have been looking for,"

said Eochaid, "and he bids you welcome." From now on no other woman shall hold my love." And so they were wedded and lived together until King Eochaid died.

They had one daughter and she was named Etain after her mother. She married Cormac, king of Ulster, and like her mother she had one daughter. But Cormac was vexed because he wished for a son instead of a daughter; and he bade two of his serving men take the child out of his sight, and put her in a pit to die. So they brought her to the pit, but when they were putting her in she smiled at them so sweetly that they had not the heart to harm her. They then brought her to a calf-shed belonging to the herders of the cattle of Etercel, great grandson of Iar, king of Teamhair. The herders cared for her with love and kindness and no king's daughter was more beautiful or virtuous than she, the maiden Etain, to whom Cormac had denied a father's love and protection. And the herders made for her a little house of wicker work. The little house had no door; only a large, high window.

King Etercel's people thought that the herders stored provisions in the wicker house. But one day a man from among them got up and looked

in through the window and instead of a store of provisions, he saw the best behaved and most beautiful young girl of the whole world.

When King Etercel heard this he sent the noblest of all his warriors to break into the wicker house and bring Etain away, without asking permission of the cowherds. For King Etercel thought she must be the woman who it had been foretold would be his wife.

But early in the morning, before the king's messengers reached the house, a bird flew in through the window, and it left its bird-skin on the floor and stood before Etain changed to a man, and he said to her:

"The king is sending messengers to bring you to him for he wishes to make you his wife. And you will have a son whose name will be Conaire, son of Mess Buachall, that is, 'son of the cowherd's foster-child.' And there will be geasa on him, that is bonds, never to kill a bird for I will be his father." With that he disappeared in his bird-skin and flew out of the window, and the king's messengers came and breaking down the wicker house brought Etain away to the king.

When her son Conaire was born, Etain asked that he might be brought up between three house-

holds; the household of the herders, the household of the Maines and her own household.

So Conaire was reared as his mother wished and there were five other boys reared along with him: Ferger, Fergel, Ferogian, Ferobain and Lomna Druth, the jester of the house of Dond Dessá, who was champion of the army from Mu Muclesi. And they all were given the same food, and their clothing and armor and the color of their horses were the same.

Maines [Mawn'yahs]. Lomna Druth [Lŭm'na Drōō]. Lifè: River at the mouth of which Dublin is located. Ath Cliath [Aw Clēē'ah]: Same as Athaclee, page 57.

CHAPTER II.

And, while Conaire was yet quite young, king Etercel died; and after his death a bull feast was made ready at Teamhair, for the custom was to find out by means of a bull feast who was the best man to succeed to the kingship.

This is the way in which a bull feast was made. A white bull was killed and his flesh was boiled in a great caldron, and one man would eat of the meat and drink of the broth until he was fully satisfied. Then he would sleep; and a charm of truth would be said over him by four Druids, and whoever he would see in his sleep would be king. And when he awoke he would describe to the people the appearance of the man he had seen in his sleep, and if he told anything but the truth his lips would perish. This time the dreamer saw in his sleep a young man who did not have sufficient clothing to keep him from being scorched by the sun and chilled by the wind. The young man had a stone in his sling and was hurrying along the road to Teamhair as if looking for something to wear.

Conaire at this time was playing games near

the Lifè river with his foster brothers, and the cowherds who had reared him came and bade him go to Teamhair to the bull feast.

So Conaire left the others to play their games without him and started in his chariot for the bull feast. And as he fared on his way he came to Ath Cliath, where he saw some white speckled birds; the largest and finest he had ever seen. He followed them until his horses were tired but could not come up with them, for they always kept just beyond his reach. So he got down from his chariot and taking his sling followed them to the shore of the sea. When the birds reached the sea they swam away on the waves and Conaire went after them and tried to seize them. Then they left their bird-skins on the water, and rose up in the likeness of men before Conaire, and turned to face him with spears and swords.

But one of the birds stepped to Conaire's side in token of protection, and said to him: "I am Nemglan, king of your father's birds. You are under geasa never to cast a stone at birds and there is great reason why all birds should be dear to you."

"I have never heard of the geasa before," said Conaire dropping the stone from his Nemglan [Nev' glan].

sling. Then Nemglan said: "We have a message for you and it is this: Go to Teamhair tonight to the bull feast. By doing so you will be made king; for the kingship is to be given to a man who will go along one of the roads to Teamhair, toward the end of the night, and whose clothing is not sufficient to keep his body from being scorched by day and chilled by night."

"I will go," said Conaire, "for I have a right to be king when my father and grandfather have been king before me."

"You will be king, indeed," said Nemglan, "and your bird-reign will be renowned, but there are geasa, that is bonds, on you not to do these things which I shall name:

"Do not go right-hand-wise around Teamhair nor left-hand-wise around Bregia. Do not hunt the evil beasts of Cerna. Do not go out beyond Teamhair every ninth night. Do not settle the quarrel of two of your own people. Let no robbery be done in your reign. Do not sleep in a house from which you can see the firelight shining after sunset. Do not let one man nor one woman come into the house where you are after sunset. Do not let three Reds go before you to the house of Red."

As soon as Nemglan had finished speaking, he and his companions resumed their bird-shapes and flew rapidly away.

Then Conaire, remembering what had been told him, left his raiment lying on the strand and picking up another stone for his sling set out for Teamhair. And on each of the four roads to Teamhair three kings were waiting; and they had with them clothing for the king whose coming had been foretold at the bull feast. And the three kings on the road Conaire was traveling when they saw him coming went forth to meet him, and they put royal clothes on him and brought him in a chariot to Teamhair.

But the people of Teamhair when they saw him said: "Our bull feast and our charm of truth were of little worth when they have brought us only a young, beardless lad."

But Conaire said: "My youth does not unfit me to be your king, for my father and my grandfather have both held the same place. "That is true," said they; and then they gave him the kingship. And Conaire said to them: "I will be a just king to you and I will learn of wise men, that I also may be wise."

And during Conaire's reign there was peace

and plenty throughout Eire. Seven ships at a time came into Inver Colpa, and there were corn and nuts up to the knees in every harvest, and trees bending from the weight of fruit and the Buais and the Boinne were full of fish every summer. And among the people there was such good will that they thought each others voices as sweet as the strings of harps. Even the wolves themselves were held by hostages not to kill more than one calf in every pen.

During all Conaire's reign there was no thunder nor storm, and from Baal Tinne until Samhain there was not as much wind as would stir the rushes in the water. And the cattle were without herders because of the greatness of peace. And his reign crowned Eire with three crowns: the crown of flowers; the crown of acorns and the crown of wheat ears.

Inver [Estuary]. Inver Colpa: Estuary of the Boyne river at Drogheda [Draw'däh]. Tinnee [Tin'neh]. Baal Tinne: Baal Fire; Month of May. Samhain [Soy'nah]: Month of November.

CHAPTER III.

But after awhile the sons of Dond Dessá grew discontented, because they were hindered from the robbery and killing which used to be in the old time. And to vex the king, and to see what he would do, they stole three things: a pig, a bullock and a cow from the same countryman every year for three years. And every year the countryman went to the king to make complaint and every year the king said: "It is to the sons of Dessá you should go, for they took the beasts." But when the countryman went to the sons of Dond Dessá he received no satisfaction, but insults and threats were added to his injuries. And he was afraid to go back and tell the king for fear of vexing him.

So the sons of Dond Dessá continued their depredations and three times fifty other young men, sons of the great men of Eire joined them.

And one time when they were doing their wicked work in Connacht they followed a swineherd, who ran from them and called for help, and the people came in haste when they heard the cry; and they caught the robbers and brought

them back to Teamhair. King Conaire was then called upon to give judgment and this is what he said: "Let every father of a robber put his own son to death, but let my foster-brothers be spared."

"Give us leave," said the people, "and we will put them to death for you."

"I will not consent to that," said Conaire, "Their lives shall be spared; yet if they must continue in their robbery let them go across the sea to Alban."

Thereupon the sons of Dond Dessa were driven out of the country, and some of the Maines went with them, and the sons of Ailell and Maeve and three great fighting men of Leinster, who were called the Three Red Hounds of Cualu; and they also brought with them a troop of wild, restless men.

And when they were out in their ships on the rough sea, they met the ship of Ingcel, the One-Eyed grandson of Cormac of Britain. They were going to make an attack on him but Ingcel said "Instead of fighting let us come to an agreement for you have been driven out of Eire and I have been driven out of Britain. Let us unite," said Ingcel, "come you with us and we will spoil

Ailell [Awl'yēl]. Maeve [Māve]: Same as Queen Mab of Shakespeare. Ingcel [Ing'kel].

the people of my country." So to this they agreed; but they cast lots as to where they should go first and it happened that, according to lots, they should first go to Britain with Ingcel. So they wrought great ravages in Britain, and then set out for Alban, repeating their destruction and robbery. At last they turned back again to Eire.

Now at this time the peace of Eire had been broken by the two Cairbres, who were at war with one another in Tuamumain of Munster, and no one was able to put an end to their quarrel until Conaire himself went to Tuamumain for that purpose. But in doing this he broke two of the geasa put on him by the Man of the Waves. On his way back to Teamhair, when he was passing Usnach in Meath, he and his people thought they saw fighting from east to west, and from north to south, and armies of savages and the country of the Ua Neills like a cloud of fire around them.

"What means this?" said Conaire. "It is easy to answer that," said the people. "The king's law has been transgressed and the country is on fire."

"What way is the best way for us to go?" said Conaire.

"To the northwest" said his people.

Tuamumain [Tōō'ah moon]. North Munster, modernized: Thomond.

So they went right-hand-wise around Teamhair and left-hand-wise around Bregia; and by doing this Conaire again broke his bonds. Also they hunted wild beasts, which they encountered on their way, and Conaire did not know until afterwards that they were the evil beasts of Cerna.

It was the Sidhe who had put that Druid mist of smoke about Conaire, because he had begun to break his bonds. Great fear came over him and, hardly knowing what to do, he and his people traveled south by the sea coast on the road of Cualu. As evening came on Conaire said: "Where shall we go to spend the night?"

Then MacCecht, one of Conaire's fighting men, who kept three of the Fomor as hostages at the king's court so that their people would not spoil corn or honey in Eire during his reign, answered the king: "This much I can truly say, O king: It is oftener the men of Eire have quarreled to entertain you, than you have strayed about looking for a lodging."

"I have a friend not far from this," said Conaire, "if we but knew the way to his house, we could go there."

"What is his name?" asked MacCecht.

The houses of the ancient Gaels were made of wood. Mac Cecht
[Mac Kāy'acht].

“Da Derga of Leinster; it is he who keeps the great inn,” said Conaire. “He came once to ask a gift of me, and I did not refuse, but gave him horses, cattle and swine; cloaks of fine cloth, swords, spears and red-gilded brooches; good brown ale and white hounds in silver chains. And I would do the same by him again should he come to me. Surely he would not begrudge me anything should I go to his house to-night.”

“As I remember,” said MacCecht, “the house of Da Derga has seven doorways and seven sleeping rooms between every two doorways; and, we are now going directly toward it.”

“Let us continue on this road until we come to the house you speak of,” said Conaire.

“If you wish to do that,” said MacCecht, “I will go on before you and light a fire in the house.”

So Conaire and all his people went on toward Ath Cliath and presently a man with hair cut short and with but one hand, one foot, and one eye and an altogether dreadful appearance overtook them. In his hand he held a forked pole of black iron; on his back he carried a black-bristled,

Da Derga: Its location was a few miles South of Dublin. The road thither has the same name it had in the first century. Boher Na Brēna.

singed pig which squealed vociferously; and after him hurried a large-mouthed, ugly woman.

"Welcome to you, my master Conaire," he said.

"Who gives this welcome?" said Conaire.

"Fer Coille, the Man of the Wood," said he, giving Conaire an uncanny glance of his one great eye. "I offer you the shelter of my house tonight; and my black pig is a surety that you shall not go fasting, but feast and sleep as becomes the best king in the world."

"I will not go to your house tonight," said Conaire, "but any other night it pleases you I will accept your hospitality, only leave me now and go your own way."

"That we will not do," replied Fer Coille, "but we will spend the night with you in whatever place you may be, O fair little master, Conaire."

So he went on toward the inn; his wife behind him, and his black pig squealing on his back.

Soon afterward Conaire saw three horsemen going toward the inn. They had red cloaks; red shields and red spears in their hands and they were mounted on red horses.

"What men are these riding before me?" said

Conaire, "I am under geasa not to let them go before me: three Reds to the house of Red, that is the house of Derga. Who will overtake them and bid them come back and follow me?"

"I will overtake them," said Lefriflaith, Conaire's son, and speaking to his horse he galloped away.

But however fast he rode he could not overtake the three red horses and their red-clad riders, so he called to them to turn back and not continue riding before the king. To his first and second call they did not reply, but the third time one of the three men looked back and said: "Dire news awaits us, my son, wetting of swords; destroying of life; shields with broken bosses after the fall of night! We ride the horses of the Sidhe, and although we are alive we are dead." With that the three red riders vanished, and Lefriflaith went back to his father.

"You did not keep back the men," said Conaire.

"I have failed indeed," said Lefriflaith, "but I could do no more than I have done." And then he told the king and his people what the red horseman had said. This gave them all great uneasiness, and Conaire said: "All my bonds are

broken tonight, and those three Reds before me are sent by the Sidhe."

Now while Conaire and his people were on the road of Cualu, going toward the inn, Ingcel and the outlaws of Eire were come in their ships to the coast of Bregia opposite Etair. And the sons of Dond Dessa said: "Furl the sails now, and send a light-footed messenger on shore to find out what prospect there is of keeping our bargain with Ingcel; we must give him spoil for spoil."

"Let some man go" said Ingecel "who has the gifts of keen hearing, far-sight and judgment."

"I have the gift of keen hearing," said Maine Milscothach. "And I have the gift of far-sight and judgment" said Maine Andoc.

"Then it is well for you both to go," said the others.

So they landed and fared on until they came to Beinn Etair, and there they stopped to see and hear.

"Be quiet; listen," said Maine Milscothach.

"What do you hear?" said Maine Andoc.

"I hear the coming of a king," was the reply "Look now and tell me what you see."

"I see," said Maine Milscothach, "a great

Milscothach [Mils kō'häh]: Honey-blossoms. Andoc [Än'ök]: Youthful Beinn Etair [Ben Edar]. Proper names and names of places are often spelled differently in different texts.

company of men traveling over hills and rivers. They have clothes of every color, grey spears over their chariots, and swords with ivory hilts and silver shields. And I swear by the gods of the air the horses they have with them are the horses of some great chief."

"It is my opinion," said Maine Andoc, "that the king you see is Conaire, son of Eterscel, traveling with a great company of men of Eire."

With that they went back and told their comrades what they had heard and seen. So the sons of Dond Dessá and Ingcel had their boats brought to shore and landed on the strand of Furbuithé.

Just at this moment Mac Cecht was striking a spark to kindle a fire in the inn before the High King.

And Conaire and his people when they arrived at the inn entered and seated themselves; and so did the three red men, and the Man of the Wood, the swineherd of the Sidhe, with his squealing pig.

And when they were seated Da Derga came to greet them. With him were three times fifty long haired fighting men. Each one of them wore a

Furbuithé [Fur bwēē'häh].

short cloak and carried a great blackthorn stick with bands of iron.

"Welcome, my master Conaire," said Da Derga, "and if you were to bring all the men of Eire with you there would be a welcome for them all."

When twilight shades had fallen, a lone woman came to the inn. She was wrapped in a grey woolen cloak over which fell the tangled masses of her long hair. Her mouth was drawn to one side of her head and she leaned against the door-post and threw an evil eye on the king and the young men about him.

"Well, woman," said Conaire, "if you have the Druid sight, what is it you see for us?"

"This is what I see for you," said she, "nothing of your skin; or, of your flesh, will escape from the place you are now in, except what the birds will bring away in their claws. And now let me go into the house," she continued, attempting to enter.

"I am under geasa," said Conaire, "not to let one lone woman enter the house after the setting of the sun." And turning to the servants he said: "Bring this woman a good share of food

from my own table; but see that she spends the night under some other roof than this."

"If the king is no longer hospitable, and it has become his custom not to let one lone woman come into his house to be fed and lodged, I will go elsewhere and seek hospitality from some better man."

"Let her in regardless of my bonds," said Conaire when he heard that.

So they let her in, but none of them felt easy in their minds after what she had said.

While all this was happening, the outlaws were on their way to the inn. And when they came to Leccaibcend Slebe they saw the great light which was shining from the inn through the wheels of the chariots that were outside the doors.

"What is that great light yonder in the distance?" said Ingcel to Ferogain.

"I think it must be the fire of Conaire, the High King," said Ferogain, "and I fear if he is there tonight that harm will come to him, or his life be shortened; and he a branch in its blossom!"

"And I count it good luck if he is there" said Ingcel. "Spoil for spoil! Should Conaire fall into our hands it would be no worse for you, than

Leccaibcend Slebe [Lack' äv kin Schlāv].

it was for us when we lost our people and our our king!"

"That is true! That is true!" said all the others.

Then every man of them brought a stone from the strand to make a cairn, as was their custom before making an attack on any place, for by this they could determine how many men had been lost. For every man that would come from the fight would take his stone from the cairn and the stones of all that had been killed would be left there.

After the cairn was made they held a council, and it was agreed that Ingcel should go as a spy to the inn. So he went and spent some time looking in through the seven doors of the house. But at last one of the men inside caught sight of him, and Ingcel, seeing that he was found out, made his way back to where his comrades were sitting, with their leaders in the middle, waiting to hear his tidings from the inn.

"Did you see the house, Ingcel?" said Fero-gain?"

"I have looked through the seven doors of it," said Ingcel "and whether there is a king in it or

not it is a royal house, and I will take it for my share when the spoils are divided."

"You may do that," said Conaire's foster brothers, "but we will not go against it before we know who is in it."

"The first I saw" said Ingcel, "was a large man of good race with bright eyes and hair like flax; his face was wide above and narrow below and he had no beard. His mien was modest and frank. He had a five barbed spear and a shield with five gold circles on it. There were nine men round-about him, all fine looking and so much alike that you would think that they had the same father and mother. Who were those men, Ferogain?"

"It is easy to answer that," said Ferogain. "They were Cormac Conloingeas and his nine comrades. These men have never put anyone to death because of poverty, nor spared him because of riches. It is a good leader they have, for Cormac is the best fighter behind a shield in all Eire. I swear by the gods of the air, it is no small slaughter they will make before the inn tonight."

"If I had my way," said Lomna Druth, the jester, "an attack on the inn should never be made

Conloingeas [Koon ling'ähs]. Conall Cearnach [Cön'nal Kär'näch].

if it were only for the sake of that one man, the comely and gracious Cormac Cónloingeas."

"Your wishes will have no weight in this matter. It is not of Cormac, but of yourself you are thinking, I know you well, you are but a poor fighter and the mists of weakness are darkening round you. No one, either old man or story teller, will be able to say that I drew back from this fight before I had gone through it."

"That is all well enough for you to say, Ingcel," said Lomna. "You will live to take part in many another fight; and you will bring away the head of a strange king with you from this one; but, as for me, my head will be the first to be tossed to and fro tonight."

"What did you see after that?" said Ferogain to Ingcel interrupting the conversation.

"I saw a room in which were three tender youths, wearing cloaks of silk with golden fastenings. Their golden hair was as curly as a ram's head. A golden shield and the candle of a king's house was over each one of them, and they were favorites of the entire household. Can you tell me who they were Ferogain?"

But Ferogain was weeping so that the tears ran down the front of his cloak, and it was a long

time before he could control himself sufficiently to speak. "O little ones!" he said then, "I have good reason for weeping. Those three fair youths are the king's sons Oball, Obline and Corpre Findmor."

"Ah, grief is ours if that story be true," said the other sons of Dond Dessá, "for none are more worthy of love than the king's sons. They are mannerly, brave and kind. All who have been with them regret parting from them. Shame on him who would destroy them!"

"I saw after that," continued Ingcel, "a man with a golden bush of hair the size of a reaping basket. A long, heavy, three-edged sword was in his hand, and he carried a red shield speckled with rivets of white bronze between plates of gold."

"That man is known to all men of Eire," said Ferogain, "He is Conall Cearnach, son of Amergin; of all the men in the world he is dearest to Conaire. The shield he carries is the Lam-tapaid. When the attack on the inn is made Conall Cearnach with his Lam-tapaid will be at every one of its seven doorways. What did you see after that, Ingcel?"

"I saw" he said, "a big brown man with short

brown hair, who wore a red speckled cloak and his shield was black with clasps of gold. With him were two chief men, in their first greyness, and black swords hung at their sides. One of them had in his hand a great spear with fifty rivets through it. He shook the sword over his head and struck the haft against the palm of his hand three times and then plunged it into a great pot that stood before them, and when he was putting it in, there were flames on the shaft. Who were those men, Ferogain?"

"That brown man is Muinremar, son of Geirgind, one of the champions of the Red Branch. One of his companions is Sencha, the beautiful son of Ailell. The man with the spear is Duach, the Beetle of Ulster, and the spear in his hand is Celthair's Luin. It was in the battle of Magh Tuireadh, and was brought from the East by the three children of Tuireann. When the hour of battle is near, it flames up of itself, and it must be kept in a caldron of water or it will pierce whoever grasps it."

"And after that", said Ingcel, "I saw a room in which were nine fair haired men with speckled cloaks. Above them were nine bagpipes, and the ornaments they wore emitted a brilliant light."

Muinremur [Win row' [cow] er]. Geirgind [Gär'gin]. Sencha
[Shän'chä]. Celthair's Luin [Kelt'yher's Lin].

"Those are the nine pipers from the hill of the Sidhe at Bregia," said Ferogain, "They came to Conaire because of his great fame. They are the best pipers in the whole world. They are good fighters; but to fight with them is to fight with a shadow; for they kill, but cannot be killed, because they are from Sidhe."

"And next I saw three very large men, terrible to look at. Their clothing was made of rough hair, and each one of them held a club of iron in his hand. They stood alone sad and silent; every one in the house avoiding them. Who were those men Ferogain?"

Ferogain was silent for a while and then he answered: "I do not know who these men can be unless they are the three giants Cuchulain spared the time he took them from the men of Falga. He would not let them be killed because of their strange appearance. Conaire bought them from Cuchulain after that and they are with him yet."

"I saw nine men in the north part of the house," said Ingcel, "having manes of very yellow hair, and short linen dresses and purple cloaks without brooches, broad spears, and red curved shields."

"I know those men:" said Ferogain, "they are three royal princes of Britain; Oswald, Osbrit

Cuchulain [Kōoh' ul län]: The most renowned of the Red Branch Knights, A Pagan order which flourished in the first century of the Christian era. Cuchulain was called the mightiest hero of the Scots. Scots: A name by which the ancient inhabitants of Ireland were known in history and song.

of the Long Hand, and Lindas, and their foster brothers, all of whom are with the king."

"And three Red Men I saw after that"; Ingcel continued, "red shields above them, red spears in their hands and their three red horses were bridled in front of the inn."

"These are three false and deceitful champions from the Sidhe," said Ferogain. "They were sentenced by the king of the Sidhe to be thrice destroyed by the king of Teamhair, and Conaire is the last king through whom they will be destroyed. It is to work out their own destruction they are come. What more did you see? Tell us more, O Ingcel of Britain, for with thy one eye thou hast seen more than most other men could see with two."

"I saw a white haired man, partly bald and in his ears were rings of gold. In his hands were nine swords, nine shields, and nine golden apples. He kept throwing each one of them upward and not one would fall on the ground, but all would rise and fall past each other like bees on a sunny day. But when I looked at him he let everything drop to the ground, and the people about him cried out in amazement; and the king, who was

sitting near by, said to him: 'We have been together since I was a little boy, and your tricks never failed until tonight.' "

" 'My grief,' he said, 'Fair master Conaire, good cause there is for failure; an unfriendly eye looked at me, and there is some bad thing in front of the inn! ' "

"When the king heard this he said: 'This reminds me of a dream I had a while ago: In my sleep I heard the howling of my dog Ossar; the groans of wounded men; and felt the bitterness of a wind of terror on which was wafted the caoining which overcomes laughter.' "

"The man with the earrings was Taulchinne, Conaire's juggler," said Ferogain. "And tell me now, what was the appearance of the king?"

"Stately and handsome is Conaire, the king," said Ingcel "and though young, wisdom and power speak in his glances. His hair was purest gold; the cloak about him the mist of a May morning, changing from color to color, fading and brightening with beauty untold. The brooch he wore was a wheel of gold reaching from his chin to his waist, and within his reach lay his golden hilted sword."

"That was Conaire, the High King indeed,"

said Ferogain. "Of all the kings of the world he is the greatest and best and comeliest. In wisdom bravery and eloquence he excels all men. A simple man peaceable and affectionate; but, when his anger is aroused, and he would right a wrong, not all the champions of Eire and Alban will win their battle while he is against them. And I swear by the gods of the air, unless overcome by thirst or sleep, that man alone would hold the inn until help could gather to him from the wave of Cliodna in the south, to the wave of Easruadh in the west." "It is time for us to arise," said Ingcel then, "and proceed to the inn."

So with that the outlaws rose and went on to the inn, and the clamor of their voices was heard round-about it.

Conaire was the first to hear them. "Listen," he said, "what is that noise without?"

"The shouts and challenges of fighting men," said Conall Cearnach.

"There are fighting men to meet them here!" exclaimed the king.

"They will be wanted tonight!" added Conall, raising his voice above contentious cries and clash of weapons.

Cliodna [Clīē'nah]. Easruadh [Ähs rōō'äh]: The three "tonns" or waves of Eire were the wave of Truagh beyond the mouth of the river Bann, the wave of Ruraigh in Dundrum Bay and the wave of Cliodna in Glandore harbor in the South of Cork.

CHAPTER IV.

Then Lomna Druth, the jester, ahead of all the others, broke into the house, and the door-keepers struck off his head, and it was tossed three times in and out of the inn, just as he had foretold.

And one man attacked another until all were in the fray, and Conaire, the king, went out with his people and many of the outlaws fell by his hand. Three times the inn was set on fire and three times the flames were extinguished, and after that Conaire made his way back to where his weapons lay, for he had been without them through the first of the fight; then, fully armed, he went out again and drove the outlaws back with great slaughter.

"I told you" said Ferogain, "that all the men of Eire could not take the house from Conaire, the king!"

But the druids, who were along with the outlaws, said: "His hour of triumph will soon end, and the day of victory be ours!"

And by means of their druidical enchantments Conaire became very thirsty, and went into the inn for drink.

"A drink for me, MacCecht!" he cried.

"It is not such a command as that, MacCecht is used to taking from Conaire, the king," answered MacCecht. "My duty is to keep you from the men who seek to slay you; but ask a drink of your steward or your cup-bearers."

Then Conaire called to his cup-bearers for water. "There is none" they answered, "for every drop in the house was thrown on the fire to put it out."

"Get me a drink," said Conaire, speaking again to MacCecht. "I may as well die by an outlaw's hand as for the want of water."

Then MacCecht asked the champions of Eire who stood near the king which they would rather do: go out and find him a drink or stay in the house and defend him. Conall Cearnach replied: "Leave the defense of the king to us, and go yourself for the water, for it was of you the king asked it."

So MacCecht went to look for a drink and he took Conaire's great golden cup with him and he armed himself with the iron cauldron spit. And as he sped through the outlaws he defended himself with the spit; and many an outlaw died from a blow of it. And finally holding

his shield before him, he made a round with his sword above his head and cutting down all before him made his way past chiefs and champions.

And all that happened after that would make too long a story. The people of the inn came out to meet the attack of the outlaws; and, though some died in the fight, many escaped. At last there was no one left in the inn with Conaire but Conall, Sencha and Duach.

Now Conaire from rage and fighting had brought a fever of thirst upon himself; which so overcame him that after hours of suffering he died.

When the other three men saw that the high king was dead they went out, and, cutting their way through their enemies, wounded and disheartened escaped with their lives.

And Conall Cearnach, when he had sufficiently recovered his strength, went on to his father's house. But half his shield was left in his hand, and his two spears were bent and broken.

He found Amergin, his father, out before his dun in Tailltin. "Those are fierce wolves that have hunted you, my son," said Amergin.

"I am not wounded by wolves but by fierce fighting men," said Conall.

Tailltin [Təl'tin]: Now called Teltown. Fairs were held here from earliest times until the twelfth century. Tailltin is the Olympia of the Gael.

"What news have you brought from Da Derga's inn?" said Amergin. "Is Conaire, your king, still living?"

"The king no longer lives." answered Conall.

"I swear by the gods the great tribes of Ulster swear by, he is but a coward, who came out alive, leaving his king dead among his enemies."

"My own wounds are not white, my hero father." said Conall, showing his right arm covered with frightful gashes.

"That arm has indeed been in the fight," said Conall.

"There are many now lying in front of the inn to whom it dealt dark death last night," said Conall.

Now, as to MacCecht: after he made his way through the outlaws, he hurried to the well of Ceasair, which was near by in Crith Cualann; but, there was not so much as the full of the cup of water in it. On through the night he went from lake to lake, and from river to river, but he could not find the full of the cup of water in any of them. At last he came to Uaran Garad on Magh Ai, and it could not hide itself from him and so he filled his cup and retracing his steps, reached the inn before morning. And when he arrived

Ceasair [Kāy'sar]. Crith [Crĕh]. Uaran Garad [Ōo'ran Gāw'rāh] Magh Ai is in Roscommon.

there he saw two men in the act of striking off Conaire's head.

With a sure blow MacCecht struck one of them, and severed his head from his body. Meanwhile the other man made haste to get away with King Conaire's head; but, MacCecht picking up a stone threw it and wounded him unto death.

Then he stooped and poured the water from the golden cup into Conaire's mouth. And, after the water was poured in, MacCecht heard the voice of Conaire say: "A good man and a great champion, brave of heart and hand is MacCecht. It is he who found a drink of water for a thirsty king. Gallantly he fought; no fear had he of furious foes! Would that I were alive once more to honor MacCecht of the great name."

After that MacCecht brought the body of the high king to Teamhair and buried him there as befitted a king. Then he went away to his own province of Connacht, and the place he chose to live in was called Magh Bron-gear, because of his bitter grief.

And for many years after that no Ard Righ was chosen to reign over Eire.

Bron-gear: Sharp sorrow.

Deirdre or the Fate of the Sons of Usnach

CHAPTER I.



EDLIMID, the son of Doll, was harper to king Conchubar. One day when Cathbad, the druid, was at Fedlimid's house he foretold that a daughter would be born to him. This was unexpected news to Fedlimid. "I do not believe such a thing can come to pass, Cathbad," said he.

"Nevertheless," said Cathbad, "I see by Druid signs that on account of a daughter of yours, who is not yet born, much blood will be shed in Eire, and great heroes and candles of the Gael will lose their lives because of her."

"If that is your foretelling, you would better keep it to yourself; and, moreover, I do not believe a word of it," said Fedlimid, for the druid's prophecy angered him.

"But you will live to know my foretelling is

Deirdre [Dār'dräh]. Usna [Ōos'nāh]. Felimid [Fā'li mēh].
Doll [Dholl]. Conchubar [Cōn'a chōōr]. Cathbad [Caw'fā].

true, Fedlimid," replied Cathbad, "for I have seen it all clearly in my mind." And with that he went away.

Though Fedlimid pretended not to believe what the druid had said, still he pondered over it night and day and feared in his heart it might come true. And he determined that if the child should be born, as foretold, he would hide her away where no eye could see her, and no ear could hear of her, and thus prevent the woe and warfare which Cathbad had said should be in Eire for her sake.

And it happened in due course of time that the prophecy came true, and soon after the child was born Cathbad went to Fedlimid's house and Fedlimid was ashamed when he saw him and remembered how he would not believe his words.

But the druid looked at the child and said: "Let Deirdre be her name; disaster will come through her."

Then he took her in his arms and said "O Deirdre, fair daughter of Fedlimid, there will be trouble in Ulster for your sake! O flame of beauty, you shall kindle deeds of wrath in Emain; heroes will fight for you, and the sons of kings meet banishment and death! Woe and warfare

Emain [Aw'win]: Emain Macha, the residence of the kings of Ulster. The remains are about two miles west of Armagh. They consist of a great circular rath, with a deep trench outside of it, and a high mound. The space within the rath is about thirteen acres. Emain Macha was founded about three centuries before the beginning of the Christian era by Macha of the Golden Hair, queen of Ulster.

are in your fate, O fairest child! You will have a little grave apart to yourself; you will be a tale of wonder forever, Deirdre."

Then Cathbad went away, and Fedlimid still seeking to avert the fate foretold for Deirdre gathered together his men, and brought them away with him to a great, lonely mountain, and there he bade them make a little house by the side of a round, green hillock and plant a garden of apple trees behind it and build a wall about it. And over the house he bade them put a roof of green sods so that passers-by could not distinguish the house from the hillock, nor think that any one lived there.

And Fedlimid chose Levarcham, daughter of Aedh, to care for Deirdre, and sent her and his child to live in the sod-covered house on the great, wild mountain. And he made everything comfortable for them, and gave them a store of provisions, and he told Levarcham that she should never want for anything as long as she lived.

And so Deirdre and her foster mother lived on the lonely mountain and no stranger discovered their whereabouts for fourteen years. And Deirdre grew as straight and trim as a rush in a bog; and she was as graceful as the swan on the

Levarcham [*Low'* [cow] er kām]

wave; and fleet as the deer on the hill. And no maiden in Eire was more beautiful or gentle.

And all the knowledge that Levarcham had she imparted to Deirdre. There was not a blade of grass, nor a bird singing in the wood, nor a star shining from heaven but Deirdre knew the name of it. There was one thing however which Levarcham denied to Deirdre and that was the friendship of any other person than herself.

But one cloudy, winter night a hunter lost his way on the mountain, and as he wandered on he was overcome with weariness and sleep, and lay down on the side of the green hillock near Deirdre's house. And while he was lying there he dreamed that he was near a house of the Sidhe, and could feel the warmth which radiated from it; and hear the suantraigh of the sidhe within. And he called out in his dream: "Let whoever is inside bring me in also, in the name of the sun and the moon."

Deirdre heard the voice and asked Levarcham its meaning. "It is only the birds of the air who have gone astray, and are trying to find one another" said Levarcham, "but let them go back to the branches of the wood." Soon the hunter cried out again in his dream, and again

Suantraigh [Shōōn' thrēē]: Sleep, music.

Deirdre wished to know whence the sound came. And again Levarcham answered: "The birds of the air are looking for one another, let them go past to the branches of the wood."

Then the third time the hunter called: "Let whoever is inside bring me in also, in the name of the elements, for I am perishing with cold and hunger."

"Oh tell me what is that, Levarcham?" said Deirdre.

"Nothing for you to see, my child," answered Levarcham, "nothing but the birds of the air; they are lost to one another. Let them go past to the branches of the wood; there is no place nor shelter for them here tonight."

"O, Levarcham," said Deirdre, "the bird asked to come in in the name of the sun and the moon; and you have told me we must never refuse what is asked like that. If you will not let in the bird that is perishing with cold and hunger, I must do it myself."

So Deirdre drew the bolt from the leaf of the door, and let in the hunter. And she offered him a seat, and food, and drink.

"Come now and eat," then said Deirdre "for you must be very hungry."

"Hungry and cold, indeed, was I when I came into this house" said the hunter, "but, by my word, the first glance from your bright eyes made me forget it all."

"How little you are able to curb your tongue," said Levarcham to him. "You are given the shelter of a house and the warmth of a hearth on this dark, winter night and the only thing asked in return is that you keep quiet."

"I am thankful for your kindness," said the hunter, "and surely I shall strive to talk as little as possible; but, I swear by the oath my people swear by, that if some of the people of the world whom I know saw the loveliness that is hidden away here they would soon take it from you."

"Who are they?" said Deirdre.

"I will tell you," said the hunter; "they are Naoise, son of Usnach, and Ainnle and Ardan, his two brothers."

"Describe these men to me," said Levarcham, "so that if we should ever meet, I would know them."

"I can describe them no better than this:" said the hunter, "their hair is black as the raven's wing; their skin is white as the swan's. Their cheeks are like the blood of the speckled, red calf

and the salmon of the stream or the deer of the grey mountain cannot out-leap them. And the head and shoulders of Naoise are above those of all the other men of Eire."

"That may all be" said Levarcham, instead of thanking him for his description, "but do you go away from here as fast as possible, and take another road from that you came; and, by my word, I have small thanks for you or for her who let you in."

"You need not send him away for saying what he did to me," interposed Deirdre, "for I already knew about those three men; I saw them in a dream last night, and they were hunting upon a hill."

But the hunter did not seek to tarry longer in Levarcham's house; and as he walked away he kept thinking how lonely Conchubar, the Ard Righ of Ulster, must be; for he had no wife to greet him night and morning. And he thought that if Conchubar could see the beautiful maiden of the mountain he would bring her home and make her his queen. "And," he said to himself, "I will get the good will of the king by telling him where there is a maiden worthy in every way to be his wife."

So he went directly to the palace at Emain Macha, and sent word to king Conchubar that he had news for him, and begged him to hear it.

The king sent for him and asked him the reason of his journey to Emain Macha.

"I have come to tell you, O King," said the hunter, "that I have seen the most beautiful maiden that ever was born in Eire."

"Who is this maiden?" said the king, "and where did you see her? It is strange indeed that no one has told me of her before. Are you sure it was not in a dream you have seen her?"

"I am not telling you a dream, O king, but no other man has seen this beautiful creature, nor can anyone see her unless I tell him of her dwelling place."

"If you will bring me where she is, you shall have a good reward," said the king.

"I will bring you there," said the hunter.

"Remain with my household tonight," said the king, "and early tomorrow morning I and my people will go with you."

"I will stay," said the hunter. And he stayed that night in the household of king Conchubar.

Then Conchubar sent word to Fergus and other great men of Ulster what he was about to

do. And though it was early when the songs of the birds began in the woods, it was earlier still when Conchubar, the Ard Righ of Ulster, arose with his little company of friends in the fresh May morning. And the dewdrops were glistening on bush and flower as they journeyed along toward the green hill where Deirdre was living.

And many a young man who had set out in the morning with a glad, light step walked wearily and slowly before the end of the day; so long and craggy was the way.

They were all happy when the hunter said, pointing to a little valley on the side of the mountain: "The maiden you seek lives in yonder vale, and may no wind of misfortune blow your footsteps aside before you reach it; but, as for me, I will go no nearer it than this."

Conchubar and his friends then hastened to the green hillock, and they knocked at the door of Deirdre's house. Levarcham called out that neither answer nor opening would be given to anyone whatsoever, and that she did not wish to be disturbed.

"Open," said Conchubar, "in the name of the Ard Righ of Ulster."

When Levarcham heard Conchubar's voice,

she knew it would be impossible to conceal Deirdre any longer; so she hastened to let in the king and as many of his people as could follow him.

The king, when he beheld Deirdre, thought that never in the course of the day, or in the dreams of the night, had he seen so beautiful a creature; and there and then he gave her his heart full of love. And he put Deirdre up on the shoulders of his men and she and Levarcham were brought away to Emain Macha.

And Deirdre promised that, after a year and a day had gone by, she would become the wife of Conchubar and queen of Ulster. Conchubar gave her for companions pleasant, modest maidens of her own age and a teacher from whom she learned the things most useful for young girls to know. And she became wise and skillful, and more beautiful, and Conchubar loved her more than anything in the world.

CHAPTER II.

One day, when Deirdre and her companions were walking on a hill near Emain Macha in the pleasant sunshine, they saw three men coming toward them. And as they came nearer Deirdre remembered what the hunter had said, and thought of the three men she had seen in her dream, and she said to herself: "These men I now see are the three sons of Usnach, and the tallest one is Naoise, he who is head and shoulders above all the men of Eire."

The three brothers passed by without turning to look at the young maidens on the hill side. They were singing as they walked and the singing of the sons of Usnach was enchantment and sweetest music to all listeners. And when Deirdre heard it, so great a love for Naoise came into her heart, that she could not help calling him, and her voice rang clear: "Naoise, Naoise, son of Usnach, take me with you."

Now Ainnle and Ardan, when they heard her call, knew it was the beautiful young maiden from the court of Conchubar; and they feared that if Naoise, their brother, should see her he would want her for his wife; for she was not yet mar-

ried to the king. So they said to each other: "Let us hasten our steps for the road is long and the dusk of evening coming on." They wished to get out of sight and hearing of Deirdre before Naoise should see her. But he had heard her and he said: "What cry was that? It seems to me it is not well for me to answer, and yet it is not easy for me to refuse."

"It was but the cry of Conchubar's wild ducks" said his brothers. "Let us quicken our steps for we have a long road to travel and the dusk of evening is coming on. "

They did so, and were speedily widening the distance between Deirdre and themselves when again she called: "Naoise, Naoise, son of Usnach, take me with you."

"What cry is this that strikes my heart? I do not know whether to answer it, or to disregard it," said Naoise.

"It is the honking of Conchubar's wild geese," answered his brothers, "let us not tarry to listen, but make the best of our time for the darkness of night is coming on."

So they hurried along, and the distance between themselves and Deirdre grew wider and wider, and again her call came fainter and

sweeter: "Naoise, Naoise, son of Usnach, take me with you."

"Someone is calling me," exclaimed Naoise "so sweet a voice my ears have never heard, but it strikes my heart like steel."

"You have heard but the scream of Conchubar's lake swans," said his brothers.

"It is a human cry I have heard," replied Naoise, "and I swear by my hand of valour I will go no further until I find the one who has given it."

So Naoise turned back and met Deirdre and he thought he had never seen a woman so beautiful; and there and then he gave her a greater love than he had ever given any vision, or living creature.

And he lifted her high on his shoulder, and said to his brothers: "Now indeed we may hasten our steps, and end our journey while yet some light is left in the sky."

"Leave the maiden here," said Ainnle and Ardan, "it will bring disaster upon us thus to take her away."

"Nevertheless, she shall go with us," said Naoise, "and we will leave Conchubar's kingdom before he has a chance to take her from us."

So the sons of Usnach called their people together and that night they set out with three times fifty men; three times fifty women, and three times fifty wolf dogs, and in their midst was Deirdre.

And they traveled from one part of Eire to another; from Essruadh in the south, to Beinn Etair in the east, and they were often in danger of being destroyed by Conchubar's devices.

One time the Druids raised a thick and thorny spinney before them, but Naoise and his brothers cut their way through it. Another time, while they were crossing a ford, through the spells of the Sidhe the waters rose around them and they barely escaped drowning, one and all.

And finally they sailed away to the island of Alban, and settled in a lonely place. And when hunting failed them they fell upon the cattle in the fields about them. And the men of Alban, in order to avenge themselves for the destruction of their cattle, gathered together to make an end of the sons of Usnach and their people.

But they called upon the king of Alban for aid, and he lent them a friendly hand in all their encounters and difficulties.

All this time the king of Alban knew nothing

of Deirdre nor had the sons of Usnach let any stranger see her. But it happened that early one morning the king's steward made his way into the house where Naoise and Deirdre lived; and waiting but for one glimpse of her wonderful beauty, he hastened back to the king and said: "O King, I have done what has never been done before: I have found a woman who would make a fitting wife for you. She dwells on the shore of Loch Ness, and is well worthy of you, O king of Alban. But before she can be queen, Naoise must die; for it is his wife of whom I am speaking."

"I will not harm Naoise," said the king, "but go you secretly to the beautiful woman and bid her come to see me."

The steward brought the king's message to Deirdre, but she sent him away, and told all he had said to her, to Naoise. So the king sent the sons of Usnach into every hard fight, hoping they would meet their death, but they won every battle and came safe again home. And they moved to Loch Eitche near the sea and for a while lived there in peace and comfort. And for food they caught the salmon of a spring-fed stream, from the door of their dwelling; and,

Etcha: In present glen Etive in Scotland.

from their windows, they killed the deer of the grey hills.

And when Naoise went to the court of Alban's king, none of the great men there were more splendidly attired. He wore a bright purple cloak of finest fit, trimmed with fringe of gold. His coat had fifty hooks of silver, and a brooch on which were a hundred polished gems. His weapons were a gold-hilted sword; two blue-green spears with bright points and a dagger, the color of yellow gold, which had a hilt of silver.

And the two children of Naoise and Deirdre were named Gaiar and Aebgreine; and were given into the keeping of Mannanan MacLir, the sea god, and were reared by him with greatest care in Emain of the Appletrees. And Mannanan had Bobaras, the poet, come to impart learning to Gaiar; and when Aebgreine of the Sunny Face was grown to womanhood she became the wife of Rinn, son of Eochaidh Iuil of Tir-na-n-og.

Gaiar [Gāy'ar]. Aebgreine [Āv grā'nāh]. Eochaidh Iuil [Ōch' ēē Yule]. Tir'-na-n-og': Land of the young.

CHAPTER III.

And Conchubar still reigned in Ulster. And he gave a splendid feast for the greatest of his nobles; and at the feast were Cathbad the druid; Geanan, son of Cathbad; Ferceirtne; Sencha, son of Ailell; Conall Cearnach; Fergus and Cuchulain of Muirthemne, Knight of the Red Branch of Ulster, and many other poets and heroes. And songs were sung, poems recited, and branches of kinship were traced by analysts and never was there a merrier feast until Conchubar, the king, raised his voice and said: "I desire you to tell me: have you ever seen a better house than this house of Emain, or a better hearth than my hearth in any place you have ever been?"

"We have never seen better house nor hearth than that of Conchubar, the king," they answered with one accord.

"But can you not think of something that is wanting?"

"We know of nothing from the loss of which we suffer" said they. "I do not think as you do." said Conchubar. "I know of something that is wanting and that is the presence of the three best

Geanan [Gan'nan]. Ferceirtne [Fār kārt'nāh].

candles of the Gael; the three noble sons of Usnach: Naoise, Ainnle and Ardan. No woman in the world should be able to keep them from us, they are sons of a king and they would defend the high kingship against the best men of Eire."

"We would have said that long ago, if we had dared," said they. "These three alone could defend the province of Ulster, for they are lions of endurance and bravery."

"If that is so," said Conchubar, "let us send a messenger to Alban to ask them to come back again."

"Whom will you send with the message?" asked they all together.

"There is only one way to decide that," said the king. "Naoise is under geasa not to return with any man but one of these three: Conall Cearnach, Fergus or Cuchulain; and now I will find out which of these three loves me best."

Then the king called Conall aside, and asked him: "What would you do with me if I should send you for the sons of Usnach, and they were destroyed by me—a thing I do not mean to do?"

"As I am not going to bring them," said Conall, "I will say that any Ulster man who

harmed the sons of Usnach would get shortening of life and sorrow of death from me."

"I see well enough," said Conchubar, "that you are no friend of mine."

Then he called Cuchulain to him and asked him the same that he had asked Conall. "I give you my word—as I am not going," said Cuchulain, "that if the sons of Usnach were killed in Ulster, it is not to one person only, but to every Ulsterman I thought unfriendly to them, I would give shortening of life and the sorrow of death."

"I see, indeed," said Conchubar, "that you are no friend of mine." And he sent Cuchulain away.

Fergus was the next to be called, and he was asked the same question as were the other two.

"Whatever may happen," answered Fergus, "your blood will never flow by my hand; but, if any other man should seek to harm the sons of Usnach, I hope it may be in my power to give him shortening of life and sorrow of death."

"I see it is you, Fergus, who must go for them," said Conchubar, "and do not delay but set out by sunrise tomorrow. And when you return, I put you under geasa to let the fort of Borach, son of Cainte, be your first stopping place and as soon

Borach [Bawr' äch]. Cainte [Känt' yäh].

as you arrive there, be it day or night, send on the sons of Usnach to Emain."

The king and Fergus went back to the company together and Fergus told them that it was he who had been chosen by Conchubar to fetch the sons of Usnach back to Emain Macha.

Then Conchubar went to Borach and told him to prepare a feast for Fergus on his return from Alban with the sons of Usnach. "And," said Conchubar, "he is under geasa not to refuse to partake of your feast."

Fergus set out at sunrise the next morning, and he brought with him no guard nor helpers, but only his sons: Fair-Haired Iollan, Buinne Ruadh; and Cuillan, the shield-bearer, bringing with him his shield.

They journeyed on until they reached the dwelling place of the sons of Usnach in Alban. They had three houses: The house where the food was prepared; the house where they ate; and the house where they slept.

When Fergus came to the harbor of Loch Eitche he gave a great shout. Naoise and Deirdre were playing chess, and Naoise heard the shout and said to Deirdre: "That is the shout of a man from Eire."

"I think it is the cry of a man of Alban," said Deirdre.

A second shout from Fergus sounded from the harbor. "That is, indeed, the shout of a Gael from Eire," said Naoise again.

"It is not," said Deirdre, "let us go on playing."

But a third shout was heard, and by that time the sons of Usnach knew that it was the shout of Fergus, and Naoise asked Ardan to go out and meet him.

Then Deirdre told Naoise that she knew when she had heard the first shout who gave it.

"Why did you not say so then, my queen?" said Naoise.

"Because of a vision: Last night I saw three birds who came to us from Emain Macha with three drops of honey in their mouths. They left the honey with us and took away with them three drops of our blood."

"What is your interpretation of the vision, my queen?"

"My interpretation is this: Fergus is coming from Conchubar with a message of peace for us, for honey is not sweeter than a message of peace sent from a false heart."

“Do not attach such importance to your vision, Deirdre,” said Naoise, “it signifies nothing but troubled sleep and gloomy thoughts. It is a long time since Fergus came into the harbor, go to meet him, Ardan, and bring him here at once.”

So Ardan went to meet Fergus, and his two sons: “My love to you, dear comrades,” said he.

“My fondest love to you Ardan,” said they.

“And what news have you brought from Eire?” asked Ardan.

“The best news I have for you” said Fergus, “is this: Conchubar, Ard Righ of Ulster, has sworn by the earth beneath him, by the heaven above him, and by the sun that travels to the west, that he will not rest by day nor sleep by night until the sons of Usnach come back to the country of their birth; and he has sent us to ask you there.”

But when they had come to Naoise’s house and delivered their message to him, Deirdre said: “It is better for the sons of Usnach to remain here, for they have greater sway in Alban than Conchubar has in Eire.”

“Even so,” said Fergus, “one’s own country is better than all things else; no pleasure is so great as that of living in your own home; and no sor-

row can equal the sorrow of having to dwell in an alien land."

"That is true," said Naoise, "Eire is dearer to me than Alban, though here I have greater riches and power than I had there."

So Naoise consented to return with Fergus, but it was greatly against Deirdre's will that he did so. "Remain in Alban O Naoise, my husband! I know by my dream the sons of Usnach will meet only treachery from Conchubar."

"Lay down your dream, Deirdre, on the height of the hills, lay your dream on the sailors of the sea and the rough, grey rocks; for in peace we will go and in peace we will be received by Conchubar of the Red Branch."

But Deirdre spoke again: "I see Conchubar merciless in his dun; I see Naoise without strength in battle; I see Ainnle and Ardan without shield or breastplate; I see the falseness of Fergus; and Deirdre weeping, weeping bitterly!"

"Do not be swayed by the dream of a woman," said Fergus to Naoise, "Do not slight the friendship of the Ard Righ, but come at once to Ulster."

So Naoise consented to go, and Fergus promised him protection, if necessary against all the men of Eire.

And when they were in their ships upon the sea, Deirdre looked back to Alban and said:

“My love to you, O land to the east!

It is with grief I leave your pleasant bays, your
flowery plains and heathery hills.

Dear to me is the land to the east, I would not have
come away from it, but that I came with Naoise.

Glen Masan, my grief! We were rocked to pleasant
sleep over the wooded harbor of Masan!

Glen Eitche, my grief! The home of the sun is Glen
Eitche!

Glen-da-Rua, my grief! Sweet is the voice of the
cuckoo on the bending branch of the hill above
Glen-da-Rua!

Dear to me is Droighin, dear are its waters over the
clean sands!

I would never have come away from it but that I came
with Naoise!”

Droighin [Dri' yēen].

CHAPTER IV.

It was not long until they reached Dun Borach, and Borach greeted them in the friendliest way, and told Fergus he had a feast prepared for him. And when Fergus said he could not delay for a feast but must hasten to Emain Macha, Borach said: "There are geasa on you Fergus not to leave Dun Borach until you have partaken of the feast. And it is Conchubar's wish that you send the sons of Usnach ahead of you to Emain Macha."

Fergus was very angry when he heard this: "You have done an evil thing, you and Conchubar, thus putting me under geasa," said he; and, turning to Naoise, asked whether he should go or remain.

Deirdre was the one to answer: "It should be easy for you to choose whether to refuse the feast or forsake the sons of Usnach."

"I will not forsake them," said Fergus "for I will send my sons Iollan and Buinne with them."

"By my word," said Naoise, "you speak as if we sought protection, but up to this time we have always protected ourselves and we shall do the same now."

Then Naoise and his brothers, and Deirdre, and the sons of Fergus went away, leaving Fergus with a sad heart at Dun Borach.

Naoise and his companions journeyed on and when they were near Emain Macha, Deirdre said: "I will give you a sign by which you will know whether Conchubar is dealing fairly with you or not."

"Tell me your sign, my queen," said Naoise.

"If Conchubar invites you into his own house where the nobles of Ulster are, then he will deal fairly with you; but, if he sends you to the house of the Red Branch, then beware of treachery," answered Deirdre.

They soon arrived at Emain Macha, and Naoise took the hand-wood and struck the door. The doorkeeper asked who was there, and when they told him he brought word to Conchubar.

Conchubar then called his stewards and serving men to him and asked them if the house of the Red Branch was well supplied with food and drink, and they replied that if the seven armies of Ulster should come there hungry and thirsty they would find plenty to satisfy them.

"If that is so," said Conchubar, "bring the sons of Usnach to the House of the Red Branch."

Then Deirdre said: "Let us return to Alban; even yet it is not too late."

But the sons of Usnach and the sons of Fergus said it would be a cowardly thing to return. So they went on to the House of the Red Branch, and with them went Conchubar's stewards and serving men. And all except Deirdre and the sons of Usnach ate and drank and were glad and merry.

Meanwhile Conchubar was seeking for someone to bring him word whether Deirdre was as beautiful as she had been when he first saw her. "And if she is," he said, "I will bring her to Emain Macha with edge of blade and point of spear; in spite of the sons of Usnach, however brave they may be."

"I will go to the House of the Red Branch," said Levarcham, "and I will bring you word of Deirdre's appearance."

Levarcham loved Deirdre better than anyone else, and since the time when she had gone with Naoise to Alban, Levarcham had often visited her; bringing messages from Eire to Deirdre and from Deirdre to Eire. And she went now to the House of the Red Branch, and near it she saw a troop of strange, armed men;

and she knew they must have been brought thither to aid Conchubar in battle.

And when Levarcham found Naoise and Deirdre they were playing chess and resting after their long journey from Alban. She greeted them fondly, and said: "You should not spend your time playing chess, there are greater things to be done. Conchubar has sent me to bring him word whether Deirdre is as beautiful as she used to be; and great is my grief to think of the treacherous deeds which will be done in Emain tonight, to quench the three brightest candles of the Gael."

And Levarcham wept at parting with Naoise and his people and she went back to Conchubar and he asked her what tidings she had brought of Deirdre.

"I have good news and bad news for you" said Levarcham.

"Tell me both," said Conchubar.

"The best news is this: The sons of Usnach, the bravest and mightiest men of all the world, have come to you and beside them your kingdom will need no other defense. And the worst news is this: She who was the loveliest of women when she left Emain, has lost the beauty which she used to have."

At first Conchubar believed Levarcham, but after thinking the matter over he concluded to send another messenger; and he sent Gelban, the son of the king of Lochlann, to bring him word concerning Deirdre. "For," said he, "if she has the same appearance she used to have, there is not on the ridge of the earth nor the waves of the sea a more beautiful woman."

So Gelban went to the House of the Red Branch, and through an open window he saw Naoise and Deirdre, and near them was the chess board on which they had been playing. And as Gelban stood there Deirdre caught a glimpse of him and told Naoise someone was watching them through the window. And Naoise the moment he heard this threw a chessman, which he happened to have in his hand, and put out one of Gelban's eyes.

Then Gelban went back, as best he could to Conchubar. "You were merry and pleasant going away; but you are sad and cheerless coming back" said Conchubar to him.

Then Gelban told his story, and Conchubar said: "The man who made that throw will be king of the world, unless his life is shortened. But tell me is Deirdre still beautiful?"

"No woman could be more beautiful than Deirdre," said Gelban, "and, although Naoise put out one of my eyes, I would have stayed to look at her with the other, had you not bidden me hasten back again."

Gelban's story filled Conchubar with envy, and he commanded the men of his army to take Deirdre from the sons of Usnach.

So they went to the House of the Red Branch and they gave three great shouts around it, and they put red flames of fire to it. And fierce was the fight between the sons of Usnach and their people, and Conchubar, and the men of Ulster. Buinne, the son of Fergus, fought with great valor until three fifths of the fighting men outside fell by his hand. Then Conchubar sought out the man by whose hand so many of his heroes had fallen, and said to him: "I will make you a good gift if you will leave off fighting."

"What gift is that?" said Buinne. "A hundred cantreds of land," said Conchubar.

"What beside?" said Buinne.

"My own friendship and counsel," said Conchubar.

"I will accept your gift," said Buinne.

It was a beautiful, fertile mountain which the

king gave him but it turned barren that same night, and nothing green ever grew on it again, and it was called the Mountain of the Share of Buinne.

And Conchubar's son, Fiacra the fair, and Iollan met in the fight around the House of the Red Branch. And Fiacra carried Conchubar's shield, the Ochain, and his two spears, and his sword, the Gorm Glas, and Iollan threw Fiacra down under his shield; and the shield roared, as it always did when the person who carried it was in danger. And the three waves of Eire, the Wave of Truagh, the Wave of Cliodna and the Wave of Rudraigh roared in answer to it.

And Conchubar and the sons of Usnach met in the fight and Ainnle said to Conchubar: "Although we took white-handed Deirdre from you, we have done you many kindnesses at other times; and now you should remember them. The day your ship full of silver and gold was going to wreck upon the sea, we gave you our own ship while we went swimming to the harbor."

"No thanks do I give you for that," said Conchubar, "nor for fifty times that."

Then Ardan said: "We did another deed of kindness, and now is the time for you to remem-

The Fews mountain in Armagh, as far as is known it has always been barren. Ochain [Ō'kāwn]: The Roarer. Gorm Glas [Gurm Glas]: The Blue Green.

ber it. The day your speckled horse failed you on the green of Dundalgan we gave you our grey horse to bring you swiftly over the road."

"No thanks do I give you for that, nor for fifty times that," said Conchubar.

And then Naoise said: "Now is the time for Conchubar, the king, to remember how the sons of Usnach came to his aid in the seven battles of Beinn Etair."

"For fifty times that service you should get no thanks now," said Conchubar.

And then more terrible became the fight, and the sons of Usnach linked their shields together around Deirdre, and they made three leaps over the walls of Emain, killing three hundred men.

Conchubar was filled with fear when he saw this, so he went to Cathbad, the druid, and said to him: "Go, Cathbad, to the sons of Usnach, and work enchantment on them, or they will destroy the men of Ulster forever; and I give you the word of a true hero that I do not seek to harm them, but only to make terms with them."

Cathbad believed the king, and he forthwith used all his arts and power to hinder the sons of Usnach. Through his enchantment the semblance of a dark sea rose around them, and they

Dundalgan: Gaelic name of Dundalk.

dropped their swords and attempted to swim with Deirdre through the boisterous billows. So it was that the sons of Usnach fell into the hands of Conchubar's men. And it is too sorrowful to tell how Maine of the Rough-Hand, son of the king of Norway, when asked to do so by Conchubar, slew the sons of Usnach with the sword which Mannanan MacLir had given to Naoise.

As for Deirdre, they left her to herself. And she wept and tore her fair hair and throwing herself on the ground near the grave which they were digging for the sons of Usnach she lamented bitterly:

"Long is the day without the sons of Usnach; three hawks of Slieve Cuilenn; three lions of the fort of Conrach; three heroes not good at homage; their fall is a cause of sorrow!

"Long is the day without the sons of Usnach: three pillars in the breach of battle; three pupils that were with Scathach three dragons of Dun Monad; grief for the three brightest candles of the Gael!

"My sight is gone from looking at the grave of Naoise; dig not the new grave narrow; I am Deirdre, the unhappy; I would lie in the grave with mighty Naoise."

Slieve [Schlĕv]: Mountain.
Monad [Mō'nāh].

Scathach [Skāw'hāw]: Protection.

After this caoin, Deirdre kissed the body of Naoise three times; and then she arose and fled through the night until she came to where waves were breaking on the strand of a little loch. And a fisherman and his wife saw her, and they brought her into their cabin and offered her food and drink. But she would not eat, nor drink, nor sleep; but, with her head upon her knees, she kept weeping for the sons of Usnach.

And when Conchubar found that Deirdre was gone he sent Levarcham to look for her and bring her back to the palace, that he might make her his wife.

Levarcham found her in the fisherman's cabin and bade her return to Emain Macha, where she would have riches and protection and whatever she might desire. And Levarcham gave her this message from Conchubar: "Come up to my house, O beautiful branch, with the dark eye-lashes; come, and have no fear on your fair face of hatred, jealousy or reproach."

But Deirdre said, "I will not go up to his house, I do not desire gold nor silver, nor horses nor lands; but only leave to lie in the grave with the sons of Usnach."

And again Deirdre lamented:

Caoin [Keen]: A lament.

"Delightful to Conchubar, the king, are pipes and trumpets; but the singing of the sons of Usnach was more delightful to me.

"The deep sound of waves was in their singing; dear were their pleasant words; dear their grey eyes searching the forest; and their steps were pleasant on the high, dark hill.

"Do not break the strings of my heart, Conchubar; though Naoise is dead my love is strong to live."

So Levarcham went back to tell Conchubar what Deirdre had said, and Deirdre went out on the strand of the little loch. The night was dark and her eyes were dim with weeping, and she walked into the water where it made a deep pool by the shore; and the turbid waves brought her happiness as well as death, for she did not wish to live after Naoise.

Conchubar, when he heard Deirdre's message from Levarcham, went down to the fisherman's cabin bringing five hundred men with him. And they found Deirdre's white, lifeless body on the strand. Then remorse and sorrow came to Conchubar because of the sad fate which through him had befallen the sons of Usnach and Deirdre. And they buried Deirdre near

the sons of Usnach and they raised flagstones over their graves and on them wrote their names in Ogham.

And Fergus, son of Rogh, on the day after the death of the sons of Usnach came to Emain Macha and, when he found out what deeds of treachery and terror had been done he, with Cormac Conloingeas, Conchubar's own son, and Duach, the Beetle of Ulster, made an attack on Conchubar's house. And many of his men were killed and Emain Macha was destroyed by fire.

After that Fergus and his men went into Connacht and took service with Ailell and Maeve at Cruachan. And that is how they came to fight with the men of Connacht in the war for the brown Bull of Cuailgne.

Rogh [Roy]. Ailell [Awl'yēl] Cruachan [Cru cawn']. Cul-
aigne [Cōol'yäh].

Oisin's Tale of Tir-na-n-og

CHAPTER I.



SHORT time after the battle of Gavra, in which many of our heroes fell, and among them Carbri of the Liffey, king of Eire, we were hunting on a dewy morning near the shore of Loch Lein. The trees and hedges near and far were fragrant with blossoms, and birds sang in the branches. We soon raised the deer from the thickets, and as they bounded over the plain our hounds followed in full cry.

But the hunt was not more than well begun before we saw a rider coming swiftly toward us from the west, and we soon thereafter perceived that it was a maiden on a white steed. She reined in, as she approached, and we all ceased from the chase on seeing her; for never before had Finn or the Feine beheld so lovely a maiden. A slender, golden diadem encircled

Oisin [*Aw'sheen*]. Loch Lein: Correct Irish name of the present "Lakes of Killarney." Finn: Chief of the Feine [*Fäy'näh*] or national militia of Eire. The modern Fenian is derived from Feine.

her head, and she wore a brown robe of silk spangled with stars of red gold, which was fastened in front with a golden brooch; and fell from her shoulder until it swept the ground. Her yellow hair floated like a sunlit cloud about her. Her eyes were clear as drops of dew upon the grass, and blue as the blossoms of the wild ailestar. She sat more gracefully than the swan upon Loch Lein, holding her bridle with her small white hand and curbing her steed with a golden bit. Her white steed was covered with a smooth, flowing mantle; and shod with four shoes of pure, yellow gold. And in all Eire a better, or more beautiful, steed could not be found.

As the maiden rode slowly into Finn's presence, he addressed her courteously in these words: "Who art thou, O lovely princess? Tell us thy name and the name of thy court and relate to us the cause of thy coming."

She answered in a sweet and gentle voice: "Noble king of the Feine, I have had a long journey this day, for my country lies far off in the western sea. I am the daughter of the king of Tir-na-n-og and my name is Nia of the golden hair." "And what is it that has caused

thee to come so far across the sea? Has thy husband forsaken thee, or has some other evil befallen thee?"

"My husband has not forsaken me, for I have never been married or betrothed to any man. I love thy noble son, Oisin, and that is why I have come to Eire. It is not without reason I have given him my love, and undertaken this long journey; for I have often heard of his bravery and gentleness, and his noble bearing. Many princes and high chiefs have sought me in marriage, but I never consented to wed, for my heart was indifferent to all men until it was moved with love for thy gentle son, Oisin."

"When I heard these words; and when I looked on the lovely maiden, with her dew-bright eyes and glossy golden hair, I was all over in love with her. I went to her and taking her slender hand in mine, I told her she was a mild star of brightness and beauty; and that I preferred her to all other princesses of all lands whatsoever, and would gladly make her my wife."

"Then," said she, "I place you under geasa, which true heroes never break through, to come with me on my white steed to Tir-na-n-og, the land of never ending youth. It is the most de-

lightful and the most renowned country under the sun. Gold and silver and jewels; and honey and wine are there in abundance, and the trees bear fruit and blossoms and green leaves at the same time all the year round. You will be given a hundred swords, and a hundred robes of silk and satin; a hundred swift steeds and a hundred slender hounds, of keenest scent. You will have, for your own, cows without number; and flocks of sheep with fleeces of gold; a coat of mail that cannot be pierced; and a sword that never misses a stroke and from which no one ever escaped alive. There are feastings and harmless pastimes each day. Harpers shall delight you with their sweet music. A hundred warriors fully armed shall always await your call; and you may wear the diadem of the King of Tir-na-n-og. This diadem has never before been given to anyone under the sun, and it will guard you day and night in tumult, and battle, and danger of every kind. Lapse of time shall bring you neither decay nor death, and you shall be forever young and gifted with unfading beauty and strength. All these delights you shall enjoy, and many others that I do not mention; and I, myself,

will be your wife if you come with me to Tir-na-n-og."

I replied that she was my choice above all the maidens in the world, and that I would willingly go with her to the land of youth.

When my father and his champions heard me say this, and knew that I was going from them, they raised three shouts of lamentation and grief, and Finn came up to me and took my hand saying sadly: "Woe is me, my son, that you are going away from me, for I fear that you will never return!"

His noble countenance was dimmed with sorrow; and, though I fully believed that I should see him again, I could not repress my tears as I kissed him farewell.

I then took leave of my dear companions and mounted the white steed, while the lady kept her seat before me. She gave the signal and the steed galloped swiftly and smoothly toward the west, until he reached the strand, and when his gold-shod hoofs touched the waves he shook himself and neighed three times. He made no delay but plunged forward at once, moving over the face of the sea with the speed of a cloud shadow on a March day. The wind overtook

the waves, and we overtook the wind so that we straightway lost sight of land; and saw nothing but billows tumbling before us and billows tumbling behind us.

CHAPTER II.

But after a while other shores came into view, and we saw many wonderful things on our journey: islands and cities we saw; lime white mansions and bright grianans, and lofty palaces. A hornless fawn once crossed our course, bounding nimbly from the crest of one wave to the crest of another, and close after her in full chase was a white hound with red ears. We saw also a lovely young maiden mounted on a brown steed, with a golden apple in her hand. She passed swiftly by, and a young warrior on a white steed plunged after her. This warrior wore a long, flowing mantle of yellow silk; and held in his hand a gold-hilted sword. I understood none of these things and, wondering greatly, I asked the princess what they signified.

She answered: "Heed not what you see here, Oisin, for all this is as nothing compared with what you shall see in Tir-na-n-og."

At last we saw at a great distance a palace, more splendid than all the others, rising over the waves on the very verge of the sea. As we drew near its front gleamed and glittered like the morning sun. I asked the lady what royal

Grianans [Grēē' āh nans]: Sun-bowers; summer pavilions.

house this was, and who was the prince that ruled over it.

“‘This country is the land of Virtues,’” she replied. “‘Its king is the great Fomor of the Blows, and its queen the daughter of the land of Life. This Fomor brought the lady away by force from her own country, and keeps her a prisoner in his palace. But she has put him under geasa, that he cannot break through, never to ask her to marry him, until she can find a champion to fight him in single combat. But as yet no hero has come hither courageous enough to meet the giant and rescue the lady from bondage.’”

A blessing on you, golden haired Nia, I replied, I have never heard music sweeter than your voice; and, although I feel pity for the princess, your story is pleasant for me to hear; and, moreover, I will go to the palace and try to overcome the Fomor in single combat and thus free the lady.

So we came to land, and as we drew nigh to the palace, the lovely young queen met us and bade us welcome.

She led us in and seated us on chairs of gold. Choice food was placed before us, and drinking

horns, and methers of mead, and golden goblets of sweet wine were offered us. When we had eaten and drunk, the mild, young princess told us her story; while tears welled out of her soft, dark eyes. She ended by saying: “‘Alas, I can never return to my own country and to my father’s house as long as this great and cruel giant is alive.’”

When I heard her sad words, and saw her tears falling, my heart was again filled with a desire to aid her; and bidding her cease grieving, I gave her my hand as a pledge that I would meet the giant and either slay him or fall myself in her defence.

While we were yet speaking, we saw the giant coming toward the palace, carrying a load of deer skin on his back; and holding a great iron club in his hand. He was large of body and ugly and hateful in appearance. When he saw us he threw down his load and turned a surly look on the princess; then, without greeting us, or showing the least mark of courtesy, he challenged me to battle in a loud, rough voice.

It was not my wont to be dismayed by a call to arms or to be terrified by the sight of an enemy; and so I went forth at once without the

least fear. But although I had fought many battles in Eire against wild boars, and enchanters and foreign invaders, never before did I find it so hard to preserve my life. We fought for three days and three nights without food or drink or sleep, for the giant gave me not a moment for rest; and, neither did I at any time allow him to desist from the fray.

At length when I beheld the two princesses weeping in great fear, and when I called to mind my father's deeds in battle, a furious valor arose within me and with a sudden onset I felled the giant to the earth and, instantly, before he could recover from the blow I gave him, I cut off his head.

When the maidens saw the monster lying dead upon the ground, they uttered three cries of joy and they came to me and led me into the palace.

I was covered with gory wounds and a sudden dizziness of brain and feebleness of body siezed me. But the daughter of the king of the land of Life applied precious balsam and healing herbs to my wounds; and in a short time I was healed and my cheerfulness of mind returned.

Then I buried the giant in a deep and wide grave, and I raised a great cairn over him and

placed on it a stone with his name engraved in Ogham.

We rested that night, and at the dawn of the next day Nia said to me that it was time for us to resume our journey to Tir-na-n-og. So we took leave of the daughter of the king of the land of Life. Although the princess was joyful when she thought of her release from the cruel giant, she wept at our departure, and we were not less sorry to bid her farewell.

When we had again mounted the white steed, he galloped toward the strand; and, as soon as his hoofs touched the waves, he shook himself and neighed three times. We plunged forward over the clear, green sea, with the speed of a March wind on a hillside, and soon we saw nothing but billows tumbling before us, and billows tumbling behind us. And once again we saw the fawn chased by the white hound with red ears, and the maiden with the golden apple passed swiftly by, followed by the young warrior in yellow, silken robe; mounted on his white steed. And, as before, we passed many strange islands and white palaces.

Dark clouds now hid the sky from view. A storm arose, and the sea was illumined by con-

stant flashes of lightning. But though the winds blew up from every point of the heavens, and the waves towered and roared around us, the white steed kept his course straight on, moving calmly and swiftly as before, through the foam and blinding spray.

He was not delayed or disturbed in the least, and he did not turn to the right nor to the left.

CHAPTER III.

When at length the storm abated and the sun again shone brightly, I looked around and saw a country, near at hand, all green and full of flowers; with beautiful smooth plains, purple hills, and bright lakes and water falls. Not far from the shore stood a palace of surprising beauty and splendor. It was everywhere adorned with gold and gems of every color: blue, green, crimson and yellow; and on either side were grianans, shining with precious stones, and built by artists the most skillful that could be found. I asked Nia the name of that delightful country, and she answered me: "This is my native country, Tir-na-n-og, and there is nothing I have promised which you will not find in it."

As soon as we reached the shore we dismounted, and as we did so we saw advancing from the palace a troop of noble warriors, all clad in bright garments who came forth to meet and welcome us. Following these were a stately glittering host with the king at their head, wearing a robe of bright yellow satin, and a crown that sparkled with gold and diamonds. The queen came after attended by a hundred lovely

young maidens. And in all the world could not be found a king and queen who could excel these in beauty and gracefulness and majesty.

After they had kissed their daughter the king took my hand and said aloud in the hearing of the host: "This is Oisín, son of Finn, for whom my daughter Nia traveled over the sea to Eire. This is Oisín who is to be the husband of Nia of the golden hair. We give you a hundred thousand welcomes brave Oisín. You will be forever young in this land. All kinds of delights and innocent pleasures are awaiting you, and my daughter shall be your wife, for I am king of Tir-na-n-og."

I thanked the king with all my heart, and I bowed low to the queen after which we went into the palace, and there we found a banquet prepared.

The feasting and rejoicing lasted for ten days, and on the last day I was wedded to gentle Nia of the golden hair.

I lived in the land of youth more than three hundred years, but at the end of that time it seemed to me as if only three years had passed since the day I parted from my friends.

Nevertheless, I began to have a longing to see my father, Finn, and my old companions.

So I asked leave of Nia and of the king to visit Eire. The king gave permission; and Nia said: "I will give consent; though, my heart is sorrowful, for I fear you will never return to me." I replied that I would surely return and that she need not feel any doubt or dread; for the white steed would bring me back in safety. Then she spoke these words; and they seemed very strange to me:

"I will not refuse this request, though the thought of your journey afflicts me with great grief and fear. Eire is not now as it was when you left it. The great king Finn and the warrior Feine are all gone and you will find instead an army of champions who do battle, not with sword and plunder; but, with deeds of mercy and kindness, whose laws are of forgiveness not revenge, and whose king is the Tailkenn, the lord of a country where the high places are accorded to the meek and lowly, not to the proud and powerful.

"Now think well on what I say to you and keep my words in your mind: If even once you alight from the steed, you can never come back

to me. Again I warn you: If you place your feet on the green sod of Eire, you will never return to this lovely land. A third time, Oisín, my beloved husband, a third time I say to you: If you alight from the white steed you will never see me again!"

I promised that I would faithfully remember every word she had spoken to me, and that on no account would I alight from the white steed. Then, as I looked into her gentle face and marked her grief, my heart was weighed down with sadness, and I could not restrain my tears. But even so, my mind was bent on coming back to Eire.

CHAPTER IV.

When I had mounted the white steed, he galloped directly toward the shore. We moved swiftly as before over the clear, green sea. The wind overtook the waves, and we overtook the wind, so that we straightway left the land of youth far behind us.

And as before we passed many islands and cities, until at length we landed on the beautiful shores of Eire.

As I traveled through the country I scarcely recognized the old places for everything was strangely altered. Nowhere was there any sign of Finn and his host. I began to fear that Nia's words were true.

At length, I espied in the distance a company of little men and women all mounted on little horses, and when I came near they greeted me kindly and courteously. They looked at me with wonder and curiosity, and marveled much at my great size, and the beauty and majesty of my person. I asked them about Finn and the Feine warriors: if any of them were still living; or, if any sudden disaster had swept them away.

And one replied: "We have heard of the hero

who, three times three generations ago, ruled in Eire; and who never had an equal for bravery and wisdom. The poets of the Gael have sung his deeds and the deeds of the Feine, and it is related in their songs that Finn had a son named Oisin. And the poets tell that Oisin, when he had reached the height of manly beauty and valour, went away with a young, fairy maiden to Tir-na-n-og; and his father and his friends sorrowed greatly for him; and sought him long and in many places. But he was never seen again."

When I heard all this, I was filled with amazement; and my heart grew heavy with sorrow. I silently turned my steed from the wondering people and straightway set out for Alvin of the green hill slopes. As I journeyed along I could not free my mind from forebodings of further sorrows awaiting me. When I reached Alvin I found my fears were justified; for I found the hill deserted and lonely, and my father's palace in ruins and overgrown with grass and weeds.

Slowly and sadly I turned my face from the home of my childhood, and fared through the land in every direction in search of my friends.

The Gael: The race at present called Irish. Gaelic: The language of the inhabitants of Ireland. The Gaels of Ireland are the oldest branch of the Aryan race. Eirinn [Ä'r'yan]: Genitive of Eire; a native of Eire. Alvin [Äwl'lyn]: Headquarters of the Feine of Leinster. Chief residence of Finn in Kildare.

But I met only crowds of little people who regarded me with wonder. Nowhere did I meet anyone who knew me or whom I knew. I visited all the old time haunts of the Feine; but, like Alvin, they were all solitary and in ruins.

Finally I came to Glenasmole where the beautiful Dodder flows; and where many a time I had hunted with the Feine. There I saw a crowd of people in the glen. As I approached one of them came forward and said to me: "Come to us, thou mighty hero, and help us out of our strait for thou art a man of vast strength."

I went to them and found a number of men trying to raise a large, flat stone. It was half lifted from the ground. But those who were under it were not strong enough either to raise it further or to free themselves from its weight. And they were in great distress, and on the point of being crushed to death.

I thought it a shameful thing that so many men should be unable to lift this stone which Oscar, if he were alive, would take in his right hand and fling over the heads of the feeble crowd. After I had watched them for a little while, I stooped forward and seized the flag with one hand, and putting forth my strength, I flung

Glenasmole: The glen of the thrush. Dodder: small stream flowing through Wicklow and Dublin. Oscar [Ūs'kar]: Son of Oisín.

it seven perches from its place, and relieved the little men. But my action put great strain on the golden saddle girth of the white steed under me, and bounding forward to keep myself from falling I suddenly came to the ground on my two feet.

The moment the steed felt himself free, he shook himself and neighed three times. Then, starting off with the speed of a cloud shadow on a March day, he left me standing helpless and sorrowful. Instantly a woeful change came over me. The sight of my eyes began to fade; the ruddy beauty of my face vanished; my strength left me and I fell to the earth, a withered old man, blind, wrinkled and feeble.

The white steed was never seen again. I never recovered my sight, my strength, or my youth, but have lived sorrowing for my gentle; golden haired Nia, and thinking back to Finn, my father, and the companions of my youth all lost to me now, yet hoping that sometime, somewhere I shall meet them again.

The Pursuit of the Gilla Dacker

CHAPTER I.



ON La Baal Tinne, the feast of the coming of good weather, Finn, the son of Cumal, feasted the Feine and the chief people of Eire at Allen of the Green Hill Slopes. And when the feast was over the Feine reminded Finn that it was time to begin the chase through the plains and glens and wildernesses of Eire. During the first half of the year, that is from La Baal Tinne until La Samnah, the feast of the close of good weather, the Feine were accustomed to spend their time in hunting; and during the second half of the year, from La Samnah until La Baal Tinne, they lived in the mansions and in the betas, or houses of hospitality of Eire.

And this time when the Baal Tinne feast was over, Finn and his chiefs chose the province of Munster for the first chase; and they set out with dogs and men and traveled through Offaly, and by the twelve mountains of Evlinn, until

Gilla: Servant. Dacker [Dyak'er]: Troublesome. Cumal [Cōol].

Finn: Same as in preceding story. Allen: Same as Alvin. La Samnah [Law Sow'näh]: The first day of November. La Baal Tinne: The first day of May; Day of the Baal fire. Offaly [Ō fahl'yäh]: District comprising portions of Queen's County and Kildare.

they came to Knockainey; and they pitched their tents on a level spot near its summit. Then the chase was set in order and the hunters scattered themselves over the broad plains of Munster. They hunted over Keen Avrat of Sleive Keen, and over Coil Na Drua; and, through the forest fastnesses of the patrimony of Curoi MacDara their fleet hounds followed the deer. By the shores of Loch Lein, and along the blue-waved Suir full many a quarry fell before them; and ever with keener zest they fared onward, feasting and singing by day; resting by night on fragrant beds of fern and fir until they crossed the speckled summit of Slieve-na-man.

But Finn, after a short chase over the plains of Cliach, went back to rest on the hill of Knockainey. With him was his son Oisin, Gaul MacMorna of the Mighty Deeds, Finn's shield-bearer, Skeabrac, Conan Mael and Ban Mac Breasal. The sounds of the hunt came back to Finn and his companions on the hill of Knockainey, borne across the broad plains of Cliach; and they listened with pleasure to the cheers and shouts, the whistling and signaling of the mighty heroes and to the cries of the sharp-nosed

Coil na Drua [Wood of the Druids]. Curoi Mac Dara: a contemporary of Cuchulain. Slieve-na-man: Mountain of the woman. Conan Mael [Kaw nawn' Mwāl].

dogs, as they routed the deer from their coverts and the badgers from their burrows.

Then said Finn to Ban MacBreasal: "Thou wast ever a skillful champion and a shrewd; unwearied in war or in the chase. Go, I pray thee, to the highest point of this hill whose summit shadows us and from there note narrowly the progress of the chase, and watch for the safety of the hunters, for I fear the Druidical spells of the Dedannan."

As Ban MacBreasal stood on the high hilltop, grasping his broad spears, and scanning the four points of the sky, he saw a Fomor of great size coming toward the hill leading a horse. This Fomor was the ugliest looking giant Ban MacBreasal had ever seen. His bloated body was supported on clumsy, crooked legs and broad, flat feet turned inward. His face was covered with bushy hair and his thick lips opened over long, crooked teeth. With his head poked forward, and his face turned up, he stared straight at Ban MacBreasal. A broad shield of a sooty hue, rough and battered, hung over his back. At his left hip was a long, heavy, straight sword; and in his left hand two thick-handled, broad-headed spears, old and rusty as if they had not

been used for years. In his right hand he held an iron club, which he dragged after him upon the ground; and as it trailed along it tore up a track as deep as the furrow a farmer plows with a yoke of oxen.

The giant's horse was even larger in proportion than the giant himself, and every bit as ugly. His tangled, scraggy hair was of a dingy black; and his ribs and all the points of his big bones could be counted through his hide. His legs were crooked and knotty, his neck twisted; and his jaws so long and heavy that they made his head look twice as large as it should for his body. The giant held him by a strong halter and seemed to pull him forward by main force. Every now and then the lazy beast stood still and, when he did so, the giant struck him on the ribs with his iron club; and the blow sounded as loud as the thundering of a great billow against the rough rocks of the sea coast.

Ban MacBreasal was not a man to be easily frightened, but, when he saw the giant and his horse coming toward him, he sprang from his seat and, snatching up his arms, ran down the hill slope with his utmost speed to the place where he had left the king and his companions.

He found them sitting around a chess board, deep in a game. When they saw Ban Mac-Breasal's frightened mien, they started to their feet and, looking in the direction that he pointed, they saw the big Fomor leading his ungainly horse slowly up the hill. They gazed in silent wonder until at last he approached them; and, bowing his head and bending his knee, saluted the king. Finn returned his salute and after giving him leave to speak, asked him to tell his name and from which of the three divisions of the world he had come; and, whether he belonged to the noble or the ignoble races. The king also asked what was his profession or craft and why he had no servant to attend to his horse. "If indeed," said Finn, "such an ugly old spectre of an animal can by courtesy be called a horse."

The big man answered him: "O King of the Feine, whether I come of a noble or an ignoble race I cannot tell, for I know not who were my father and my mother. As to where I came from; I am a Fomor of Lochlann in the north. I have no particular dwelling place, but travel about from one country to another, serving the great lords and nobles of the world; and, receiving wages for my services. I have often heard,

O King, of your greatness and royal bounty, and I have come to ask you to take me into your service for a year. You wish to know why I have no servant for this great horse of mine? It is because it is enough to provide for me without having also to feed my servant; for, at every meal I eat, my master must give me as much food and drink as would be sufficient for an hundred men. My name is the Gilla Dacker, and it is not without good reason that I am so called, for there never was a lazier or worse servant than I, or one who grumbles more at doing a day's work for his master."

"Well," said Finn, "I fear you are not a very pleasant fellow, but as I have never refused any man service, and wages, I will not refuse you." Whereupon Finn and the Gilla Dacker made covenants and the Gilla Dacker was taken into service for one year.

"I see no one here worthy to put a hand to my horse," said the Gilla Dacker after the agreement between Finn and himself was completed, "so I will myself place him among your horses for pasture. I value him very highly and it would grieve me very much should any harm befall him." Then turning to the King, he said:

"I put him under your protection, O King, and under the protection of all the Feine.

Every one of the Feine present burst out laughing to hear the Gilla Dacker thus showing concern for his miserable, old skeleton of a horse. The big man, however, gave no heed to their merriment; but, taking the halter off his horse's head, turned him loose in the pasture. The wretched looking old animal, instead of beginning to graze as every one thought he would, cocked his long, hard, switchy tail out straight as a rod, and running among the other horses threw up his hind legs and kicked about on this side and on that. He tore through the thickest of the herd, butting at them with his hard, bony forehead; and, opening his lips with a vicious grin, snapped at the Feine's high bred horses with his sharp, crooked teeth; nor did he desist until every animal in the herd bore some mark of his injuries. At last he left them and ran toward a small field where Conan Mael's horses were grazing by themselves. Conan seeing this shouted in great alarm to the Gilla Dacker to fetch away his horse, and not let him work any more mischief.

"The only way to prevent my horse from joining the others is to put the halter on him and

hold him," said the Gilla Dacker. "This will keep the poor beast from grazing and leave him hungry at the end of the day; but," said he to Conan, "there is the halter and if you are in any fear for your animals, go yourself and fetch my horse from the field."

Conan was in a mighty rage when he heard this; and, just as the big horse was about to cross the fence into the small field, he snatched up the halter and running forward with long strides threw it over the animal's head and tried to lead him back. But the horse refused to move. His body and legs became as stiff as if they were made of wood; and, though Conan pulled and tugged with might and main, he was not able to stir the beast an inch from his place. The Gilla Dacker looked on in a perfectly indifferent manner, and the others laughed at Conan's perplexity, but no one offered to relieve him. At last Fergus, the poet, said "I never would have believed, Conan Mael, that you could be brought to do horse service for knight or noble, in all the world. But now indeed I see you have made yourself horse-boy to an odious, foreign giant! Would it not be better for you, if indeed you must so debase yourself, to mount the old horse, and

obtain revenge for all the trouble he is giving by riding him across the country, over the hill tops and down into the deep glens and valleys, and through stones and bogs and all sorts of rough places, until you have broken the heart in his big, ugly body?"

Conan, stung by the words of the poet and the jeers of his companions, jumped upon the horse's back and began to beat him mightily with his heels, and with his two big, heavy fists. But the horse seemed not to take the least notice, and stood as if he had been turned into stone.

"I know the reason he does not go," said Fergus, "he has been accustomed to carry a horseman far heavier than you, that is to say; the Gilla Dacker, and he will not move until he has the same weight on his back as heretofore." So Conan called to his companions and asked which of them would mount with him, and help avenge the damage done to their horses.

"I will go," said Coil Croda, the Battle Victor, and up he went; but the horse did not move. Dara MacMorna next offered to go, and mounted behind the others; and, after him went Angus MacMorna; and the end of it was that fourteen men of the clans Baskin and Morna

Merna [Morn'yäh]. }

got on the horse's sharp, bony back and each one added to the thrashing begun by Conan Mael. When the Gilla Dacker saw the Feine beating his horse at such a rate he seemed very angry, and addressed the King in these words: "I now see very plainly that all the fine accounts which I have heard of you and the Feine, O Finn Mac-Cumal, are false and I will not stay in your service—no, not another hour. Judge for yourself whether any one with the least regard for his beast would allow such ill usage as your men are giving my horse, and indeed without any cause whatever. Though short the time since I entered your service, I consider it far too long; so pay me my wages and let me go my way."

But Finn refused to pay him until the end of the year.

"Well, wages, or no wages, I will now seek another master," said the Gilla Dacker, and he stood up as straight as a pillar and, turning his face toward the southwest, he walked slowly away.

The horse immediately followed his master taking the fifteen men away on his back. When the Feine saw this they raised a loud shout of laughter, mocking them. The Gilla Dacker,

after he had walked some little distance, looked back to see how it fared with his horse. Then he tucked up his skirts. And if you know what the speed of a swallow is flying across a mountain side; or, the dry, fairy wind of a March day sweeping over the plains, you can imagine the swiftness of the Gilla Dacker, as he ran down the hillside toward the southwest. And the horse, although he carried a heavy load, galloped after his master, plunging and bounding forward as if he had nothing at all on his back. The men now tried to throw themselves off but could not, for they found that they were firmly fastened on the horse's back. Conan looked back and shouted to Finn and the Feine, asking them if they were content to see their friends carried off by such a horrible, old, spectre of an animal.

Finn and the others hearing this started in pursuit of the Gilla Dacker; and away they all went over the wide, heathy summit of Slieve Luachra; and from there to Corca Divna. And they ran along by Slieve Mish until they reached Clogan Kincat, near the deep, green sea.

It was not until the horse had reached the beach, just at the water's edge, that Ligan Lumina, who had kept ahead of the other pur-

Luachra [Loch'rä]. Cloghan [Clökh hawn']: Causeway. Cloghan Kincat: Cat-head stepping stones.

Ligan: Jetsam; goods which sink when cast into the sea and remain under water.

suers, succeeded in catching him by the tail with his two hands. Ligan pulled with all his might thinking to hold the horse until the rest of the Feine should arrive. But his pulling was of no avail for the horse plunged through the waves dragging Ligan after him, thus making it impossible for him to either help his friends or free himself, as his hands clung fast to the tail of the horse.

CHAPTER II.

The great horse continued his course through the sea, fetching the sixteen Feine with him, and the waters retired before them leaving a dry, firm strand under them; while behind them followed close a wild, raging, sea, which seemed ready at any moment to topple over their heads.

But although the billows were tumbling and roaring all around them neither horse nor riders were wet by so much as a drop of brine or a dash of spray. Finn and the others, left behind on Knockainey, watched the horse and men until they lost sight of them in the sea.

After a long silence Finn spoke and asked the chiefs what they thought best to do. But they replied that he far excelled them in all knowledge and wisdom; and they told him they would follow whatever counsel he and Fergus, the poet, should see fit to give. Then Finn told Fergus to speak his mind, and Fergus said: "My counsel is that we go straightway to Ben Edar, where we will find a ship waiting ready to sail; for our forefathers, when they wrested the land from the Dedannans, bound them by covenant to maintain this ship forever fitted with all things need-

ful for a voyage. They were to do this in return for the privileges of Ben Edar; and in order that if, at any time, one of the noble sons of Gael Glas wished to sail to distant lands from Eire, there would be a ship lying at hand in the harbor ready for his voyage.

They all agreed to this counsel, and without delay turned their steps northward toward Ben Edar. They had not gone far when they met two youths of noble mien, fully armed; and wearing over their armor beautiful mantles of scarlet silk fastened with brooches of gold. After the king had returned their salute and had given them leave to converse, he asked who they were; whither they had come; and, who the prince or chief was that they served. Then the elder answered: "My name is Feradach, and my brother's name is Foltlebar; and we are the two sons of the king of Innia. Each of us professes an art, and it has long been a point of dispute between us which art is the better, my brother's or mine. We have heard there is not in the world a wiser man than thou, O King, and we have come to ask thee to take us into thy service, among thy household troops for a year; and at the end of that time to give judgment between

us in the matter." Finn then asked what were the two arts they professed.

"My art," answered Feradach, "is this: If at any time a company of warriors need a ship, give me only my joiner's ax, and my crann-tavall and I am able to provide it without delay. All I ask them to do is this: cover their heads close and keep them covered while I give the crann-tavall three blows of my ax. Then I tell them to uncover their heads, and lo, there lies the ship in the harbor ready to sail."

Then Foltlebar spoke and said he:

"This, O King, is the art I profess: On land I can track the wild duck over nine ridges and nine glens and never lose track of her until I drop upon her in her nest; and, on sea my skill is to follow the same, if only I have a good ship and crew."

"You are the very men I want," said Finn, and he told them the story of the Gilla Dacker and his horse from beginning to end. "And," he added, "we are now on our way to Ben Edar to seek a ship, so that we may follow this giant and his horse and rescue our companions."

"I will get you a ship that will sail as swiftly as a swallow can fly," said Feradach. "And,"

Crann-tavall [thōwl]: Wooden fulcrum for the oar in rowing.

said Foltlebar, "I will guide your ship in the track of the Gilla Dacker until you shall have laid hands on him, in whatsoever part of the world he may seek to hide himself." Forthwith they returned to the beach of Cloghan Kincat and they covered their heads while Feradach struck three blows of his ax on the crann-tavall. And lo, when he bade them look, they saw a ship fully fitted out with oars and sails, and with all things needful for a long voyage riding before them in the harbor. Then Kylta MacRonan went to the top of a high hill, and turning his face inland gave three mighty shouts, which were taken up by the people of the next valley, and after them by those of the next valley beyond. And thus was the signal given in every glen and valley and on every plain and hillside of the two provinces of Munster.

When the Feine heard these shouts, they ceased their sports for they knew their King was in danger. And they formed themselves into ranks, and troops, and battalions and began a march toward Cloghan Kincat. After they arrived, Finn told them the story of the Gilla Dacker's flight through the sea; and he picked out fifteen men: the bravest and best; the most dexterous,

and the swiftest of foot among the Feine, to accompany him in the quest for their friends which he was about to undertake in the ship provided by Feradach.

Among those chosen to go with Finn, the chief men were Dyna, of the Bright Face; Gaul Mac-Morna; Fergus, the Poet; and, Feradach and Foltlebar. Sad indeed was the leave-taking when they sailed away; for no one knew how far the king might have to go through unknown seas, or what spells and dangers he and his men might have to encounter in this pursuit.

After a few days fair sailing on the cold, bright sea, a great storm came from the west and the black waves rose up against them, so that they had much ado to keep their vessel from sinking. But through the roaring of the tempest; through rain and blinding spray, Foltlebar, their steersman, never stirred from the helm, or changed his course; but kept close on the track of the Gilla Dacker.

At length the storm abated and the sea grew calm; and when the darkness had cleared away the ship's crew as they looked off to the west saw not far away a vast, rocky cliff, towering over their heads to such a height that its top

was hidden in the drifting clouds of the upper air. It rose up sheer from the very water; and in the distance appeared to be as smooth as glass. Foltlebar, after looking to the four points of the sky, could track the Gilla Dacker as far as the cliffs, but no farther. So he told the heroes that he thought it was on the top of that rock the giant lived, and that in some way or other the horse must have made its way up the face of the cliff with their unfortunate companions.

The words of Foltlebar filled the heroes' hearts with sorrow and vexation, for they saw no way of reaching the top of the rock, and feared that they would have to give up the quest and return to Cloghan Kincat.

When they had spent some time in silent thought, Fergus, the poet, arose and said: "My friends, we have here among us one who in his youth was taught in Fairyland by Mannanan Mac Lir; and by Angus, the wisest of the Dedanans. All that a warrior should learn, and much druidical lore beside he is skilled in, and there are none who excel him in manly arts and champion feats. But it seems that these accomplishments of his go for naught; for, now when we stand most in need of them, he sits idly here with

us in our ship and never once offers to make an attempt to scale the face of the cliff and bring us tidings of our lost friends."

When Dyna, of the Bright Face, heard this speech his cheek grew red with shame. "It is of me you speak these words, Fergus," he said, "and your reproaches are just."

And he arose, and girded on his armor, and took his two long, deadly spears, the Crann-boi and the Ga-derg, one in each hand; and the battle fury of a warrior descended on him, so that he looked a dreadful foe to meet in single combat. Leaning on the handles of his spears, he leaped with a light, airy bound on to the nearest shelf of rock.

Crann-boi [bwēē]: The yellow spear. Ga-derg: The red javelin.

CHAPTER III.

He climbed from ledge to ledge while his companions watched him eagerly from below. After much toil he measured the soles of his two feet on the green sod at the top of the rock, and when he turned to look at his friends in the ship far below, a feeling of dizziness and dread almost overcame him. Looking inland, he saw spread out before him a lovely plain, bordered with pleasant hills; and shaded with groves of many kinds of trees.

It would bring happiness to the heart of any mortal to behold the beauty of this country, and listen to the warbling of the birds, the humming of the bees among the flowers, the rustling of the wind through the trees and the pleasant voices of the streams and waterfalls.

Dyna set out to walk across the plain.

He had not gone far, when he saw before him a mighty tree whose high branches, laden with fruit, overtopped all the other trees of the plain. This tree was surrounded at a little distance by a circle of pillar stones; and, one stone taller than the others stood in the center near the tree. Beside this pillar stone was a spring with a large,

round pool as clear as crystal; the water bubbled up in the center of the pool and flowed away toward the middle of the plain in a slender stream.

Dyna was glad when he saw the well, for he was hot and thirsty after climbing the cliff. He stooped down to drink; but, before his lips touched the water he heard the heavy tread of warriors, and the loud clank of arms. He sprang to his feet and looked around, but the noise had ceased and he could see nothing of arms or warriors.

He stood a little while wondering then stooped again to drink; and again, before he had wet his lips, he heard the very same sounds nearer and louder than before. A second time he leaped to his feet but there was no way in which to account for the clank of arms, or the sound of the tread of marching champions, which he had heard. Astonished and perplexed, he stood beside the well, and happening to look at the tall pillar stone near by he saw on its top a large, beautiful, drinking horn, chased with gold and enameled with precious stones.

"Ah," thought Dyna, "it is no doubt one of the virtues of this well that no one may drink of its waters except from the drinking horn. So

he took down the horn, dipped it into the well, and drank without hindrance until he had slaked his thirst. Scarcely had he taken the horn from his lips, when he saw a tall grugach coming toward him from the east. The grugach was clad in a complete suit of mail and fully armed with shield and helmet; sword and spear. A beautiful scarlet mantle hung over his armor and was fastened at his throat by a golden brooch. A broad band of gold, bended across his forehead, confined his yellow hair and kept it from being blown about by the wind.

He came forward with long strides and soon reached the well. He offered no greeting nor courtesy to Dyna, but addressed him in a rough, angry voice: "O, Dyna of the Feine, could you not have drunk your fill from the crystal springs of Eire? Why have you come to my island and without my leave drank from my drinking horn the waters of this well? Never shall you leave this spot until you have given me satisfaction for this insult!"

So spoke the grugach and advanced on Dyna with fury in his eyes. But there did not live a grugach who could terrify Dyna. He met the foe half way and like two enraged lions they

Grugach: A wizard. Land: A crescent of gold worn on the head.

fought through all the long day, until the gloaming; then the grugach suddenly sprang outside the range of Dyna's sword and leaping up with a great bound alighted in the very center of the well. Down he went and disappeared in a moment from the sight of the wondering Dyna. Whether the hero meant to drown himself or to play some wizard trick, Dyna knew not. He looked once more into the crystal waters of the well; all was as serene and quiet as when he first beheld them. He was filled with amazement and vexation because the grugach had so easily escaped from him and as he seated himself on the green sward to think it over, he was sorely chafed to think that he had not the least token or trophy to show the Feine after his long fight.

Dyna was hungry and tired after the toil of the day, so he set out to the forest near by to see if he could find some game for food. And as he neared the forest he saw a herd of speckled deer running among the trees. He put his finger into the silken loop of his spear and, throwing it with unerring cast, brought down the nearest of the herd. He lighted a fire under a tree and having skinned the deer he fixed it on long, hazel spits to roast. First, however, he went to the

well and fetched away the drinking horn full of water. When the deer was cooked, he ate until he was satisfied, and drank a refreshing draft from the drinking horn, then he lay down under the shelter of a tree, beside the fire and slept until morning. Then he went again to the forest and slew another deer for his breakfast, for it was Dyna's custom never to eat any food which had been left from a former meal.

After he had eaten of the deer's flesh and drunk from the horn he went toward the well. But the grugach was there before him, and stood beside the pillar stone fully armed as before, and looking more wrathful than ever. Dyna was much surprised, but before he had time to speak the grugach thus addressed him: "You have now put the cap on all your evil deeds, O, Dyna of the Feine, surely there are hunting grounds in Eire of the green plains, deep forests with plenty of deer in them, and you need not have come hither to rob me thus and kill my speckled deer. And now, O Dyna, hear me say: you shall not go hence until I have taken full satisfaction for all the injuries wrought me."

Then the grugach without waiting for Dyna to reply attacked him, and the two champions

fought until the dusk began to fall. Then the grugach again leaped into the well and disappeared.

On the third day, everything was repeated as on the two former days, and on the fourth morning, Dyna found the grugach standing as usual by the pillar stone near the well; and his looks were fiercer than ever. And once more without exchanging a word the warriors fought until the dusk of evening, and when Dyna, who was watching the grugach narrowly, saw him about to spring into the well as he had done each evening before, he threw his arms around him and held him in a mighty grip. The grugach tried to free himself while moving all the time nearer and nearer the brink of the well until finally he plunged in and down they went, Dyna and the grugach, clinging to each other; down, deeper and deeper, where nothing could be seen but darkness and shadows. At length there was a glimmer of light, then the full bright day burst suddenly upon them. Presently, without feeling any shock whatever they found themselves standing on solid ground. But that moment, the grugach, with a sudden effort, tore himself from Dyna's grasp and ran away, leav-

ing Dyna prone upon the earth. He leaped to his feet thinking to pursue the grugach, but the beauty of the surrounding scene so distracted his thoughts that he forgot the wizard-champion, giving him time to escape.

Here was a lovely country, with green-sided hills, and fair valleys between; groves of red yew trees, and plains laughing all over with flowers of every hue. Not far off was a city of grand tall houses with glittering roofs, and a magnificent royal palace. On the level green in front of the palace were a number of knights, all armed, amusing themselves with warlike exercises of sword and spear.

It was toward this assemblage that the grugach ran. Dyna looked just in time to see the knights making way for him as he passed through their ranks and inside of the palace gate. Dyna was at a loss to know what to do next; he seated himself to rest and think; and, he fell into a deep sleep. After sleeping for some time he was awakened by a smart blow. He opened his eyes and saw standing over him a tall, young man, with a comely countenance and long golden hair. The young man, finding Dyna asleep in such a dangerous place had struck him with the

flat of his sword to awaken him. Dyna, thinking him a foe, seized his arms. But the youth bade him put them up. "I am no enemy, and have come not to harm but to serve you," said he. "Come with me, O Dyna of the Bright Face, and I will give you a better place to sleep, and kindly entertainment." Dyna thanked the young man and went with him. After walking for some time they came to a splendid house which they entered. In the banqueting hall they found a noble company of twelve score and ten knights, and almost as many beautiful ladies with long, lustrous hair falling over their shoulders; and eyes as blue as the ailestar blossom. They wore mantles of scarlet satin fastened with brooches of burnished gold; and the sweet, wild lilies were not more gentle and modest than were these noble ladies in their looks and conversation. Both knights and ladies sat at tables lining the walls of the banquet hall; some feasting, some playing chess, and some listening to the music of harps.

All the knights and ladies arose and greeted the heroes when they entered, and invited them to join in the festivities.

But the golden haired prince, for such he was, told them that first Dyna must have rest and re-

freshment. Then he ordered the attendants to prepare a bath for him, and bring him rich garments so that he should be clothed like the others.

After Dyna, refreshed and cheerful, had joined the company once more he partook of food and drink and made merry with his hospitable friends. Harpers and poets; story tellers and professors of divers arts and sciences vied with each other in providing entertainment for the guests. Poetry, song and sweetest music; tales of the heroes of olden time; and, again music sweeter than Dyna had ever heard stirred the imagination and warmed the hearts of that bright gathering. And to each and every poet, harper, or entertainer of whatever kind the knights gave gifts of gold, and silver, and jewels.

After the feast was over, Dyna was shown to a couch, richly ornamented and soft with the red feathers of wild fowl, and soon he fell into a sound sleep. The next morning, when the company had again assembled, Dyna said to the noble youth who had brought him thither: "I am much surprised, O prince, at all that has befallen me in this strange land. Tell me I pray you what country is this? And who is king

thereof? And tell me also the name of the champion who fought with me four days at the well; and who at last escaped from me through the palace gate?"

"You shall be told everything; so listen, O Dyna of the Bright Face. This country is Tir-fa-tonn. The hero who fought with you is called the Knight of the Fountain, and he is the King of Tir-fa-tonn. I am the king's brother, and am called the Knight of Valour. Good reason have I to be kind to you, Dyna, for I once spent a year and a day in the household of Finn, the son of Cumal. A part of this kingdom by right belongs to me, but the king and his son have seized on my patrimony and have banished me from the palace, forcing me to live here in exile, with a few of my followers. I have here in my household seven score and ten heroes; and, if you will consent to aid me in making war on the king of Tir-fa-tonn these shall be placed under your command. By day you shall fight, by night you shall feast and rest in the palace."

So Dyna and the Knight of Valour made a covenant, and placing hand in hand pledged themselves to be faithful friends.

Tir-fa-tonn: Country under the waves.

CHAPTER IV.

It was now many days since Dyna had left his companions in the ship, and they marvelled much that he did not return with tidings of the Gilla Dacker. At length they determined to go in search of him. Feradach and Foltlebar tied all the cables and ropes they could find in the ship together in hard, sure knots; and when this was done they had a rope long enough to reach from the top of the rock to the bottom. Then they clambered up the steep face of the cliff, fetching with them the end of the rope, and one by one they drew up Finn and the rest.

When they were all up, Foltlebar led the way across the plain. And it chanced that they met a young man of majestic mien, riding a beautiful chestnut steed with a bridle of twisted gold, and a saddle of surpassing splendor glittering with gold and jewels. He alighted; and putting his hand on Finn's neck, kissed his cheek three times and: "Welcome art thou, O Finn of the famous deeds," said he, "to this, my kingdom of Sorca." And while they were conversing, a messenger came breathless into the presence of the king, and bowing low, waited impatiently for

leave to speak. And when the king asked him what news he had brought, he replied: "Direful news have I, O king, for a foreign fleet has come to our shores, a fleet so great that until the stars of heaven and the sands of the sea are counted the hosts that are landing from their black ships shall not be numbered. Already they are plundering and slaying the people of our land."

Finn, when he heard this, without waiting to be asked, proffered the assistance of himself and his soldiers.

The King of Sorca was glad of heart when he heard this offer, and he gathered his fighting men together and after many days of dreadful warfare the foreigners were overcome with disaster and set their sails and left the harbor in the night.

When the soldiers of Sorca and the Feine arose next morning, not a ship was in sight. And while they were rejoicing with each other at being freed from invasion, they saw at a distance, a troop of chieftains coming toward them, with arms and banners, ablaze with the morning sunlight.

As they drew nearer, Fergus, the poet, recognized Dyna Bainchre at the head of the troop,

and ran forward to meet him. With embraces and shouts of joy the parted friends greeted each other, and Dyna related all of his adventures from first to last. "And now," continued he, bringing forth the Knight of Valour from among the strange host, "this is he who was formerly called the Knight of Valour, but who is now the King of Tir-fa-tonn, for together have we fought and won for him his patrimony which was wrested from him by his brother, the unjust and cruel Knight of the Fountain." The chieftains in silence saluted the king and Dyna continued telling of the Knight of Valour: "He has given us tidings of the Gilla Dacker, for by means of his druidical art he has found out that he is no other than Avarta, the Dedannan, who took the form of a grugach in order that he might bring away with him the sixteen Feine to the land of promise, Tir-na-n-og, and he now holds them in bondage there.

Finn and the young king then made covenants of friendship with each other, and after they had rested a few days in the palace of the king of Sorca, they set out again on their quest of the Gilla Dacker with the skillful Foltlebar for their helmsman.

They sailed from island to island and from bay to bay, over many seas and by many shores, until at length they arrived at Tir-na-n-og where in his youth Dyna of the Bright Face had been nurtured by Mannanan Mac Lir of the Yellow Hair. It was Finn's intent to burn and spoil the country, to avenge the outrage that had been done his people, but Dyna would not hear of this and he said: "O king, it is not well for us to be at war with this people, for none are more skilled in Druidic art. Let us send a trusty herald to Avarta, that he may demand from him the liberty of our companions; if he grants our request we shall be at peace; if he refuses; then, shall we proclaim war and waste this land with fire and sword."

This advice was approved by all, and then Finn said "But how shall heralds reach the dwelling of this enchanter, for the ways are not open and straight as in other lands; but, crooked and made for concealment, and the valleys and plains are dim and shadowy and hard to be traversed."

But Foltlebar, nothing daunted by the dangers of the way, offered to go with but one trusty

companion, and Finn chose Gaul Mac Morna to accompany him.

When the two heralds approached the mansion of Avarta they found their friends amusing themselves on the green outside the palace walls; for though held captive they were treated with great kindness by Avarta. When they saw the heralds coming toward them their joy knew no bound. They crowded round to embrace them and ask them many questions about home and friends.

And while they were greeting each other, Avarta himself came forth and asked who the strangers were. Foltlebar replied: "We are heralds of Finn, the son of Cumal, and we are sent by him to demand the release of our friends, held in bondage by thy evil spells. At first Avarta made no reply, but he called a council of his chief men, and they conferred together and, having much fear of the Feine, they decided to restore Finn's people, and allow him to make his own award in satisfaction for the injury done him.

Avarta accompanied the heralds and they returned to Finn, and the King of Tir-na-n-og delivered his own message. And Finn and

Avarta put hand in hand and made a league of friendship. Then Avarta invited the heroes of Eire to a feast, and for three days they ate and drank and made merry. On the fourth day a meeting was called to hear the award. When all were gathered together, Finn was asked to name his award, and this is what he said: "I shall not name an award, O Avarta, neither shall I accept an eric from thee; but, the wages I promised thee, when we made our covenant at Knock-ainey, that I will give thee, for I am thankful for the welcome thou hast given us here, and I wish peace and friendship between us for evermore."

But Conan was not so easily satisfied, and lost no time in saying: "Little hast thou endured, O Finn, and thou mayest well waive thy award; but, hadst thou, like us, suffered from the sharp bones of the Gilla Dacker's monstrous horse in a long journey across wide seas, through tangled woods and over rough headed rocks, from Eire to Tir-na-n-og, thou wouldst, methinks, name an award."

Then Avarta, without waiting to hear more said to Conan: "Name thy award and I will fulfill it every jot, for I have heard of thee Conan,

and I fear the taunts of thy mischievous tongue."

"Very well, then," said Conan, "this is my award: Fifteen of the best and noblest men in your Land of Promise shall mount on the back of the big horse that brought me and my companions thither, and you yourself shall take hold of his tail and in this manner you shall fare back to Eire over the self same track by which we came; through the same thick, thorny woods and over the same islands and rough rocks; and this, O Avarta, is my award."

Now Finn and his people were rejoiced exceedingly when they heard Conan's award, for they had greatly feared that he might ask for treasures of gold and silver; and thus bring reproach on the Feine. Avarta promised that everything required by Conan should be done, and then the heroes took their leave. And they launched their ship on the broad, green sea and having sailed back to Eire, marched to their camping ground at Knockainy, and rested in their tents. Avarta then chose his men and after they had mounted on the horse's back, he himself caught hold of the tail and it is not told how they fared until they made harbor and landing place at Cloghan Kincat. From thence they

journeyed straight to Knockainy. Finn and his people saw them coming, the Gilla Dacker, quite as large and ugly as ever, running before the horse, for he had let go of the tail at Cloghan Kincat.

The Feine could not help laughing heartily when they saw the plight of the fifteen chiefs on the great horse's back; and they said with one voice that Conan had made a fitting award.

When the horse reached the spot from which he had at first set out the men began to dismount. Then the Gilla Dacker suddenly stepped forward, held up his arm and pointed earnestly over the heads of the Feine towards the field where their horses were grazing. This startled the heroes and they turned round, every man, to look. But nothing could they see, but the horses grazing quietly inside the fence.

And when they turned back again, intent on speaking to the Gilla Dacker and his men, they were much astonished to find them all gone!

The Gilla Dacker and his spectral horse and the fifteen nobles from the Land of Promise had disappeared in an instant; and neither Finn nor any of his chiefs ever saw them afterwards.

And thus ends the story of the pursuit of the Gilla Dacker and his horse.

The Fairy Palace of the Quicken Trees



BEYOND the border of the northern sea, in his beautiful palace of Berva, dwelt Colga of the Hard Weapons, grandson of Mighty Balor and king of the warlike Lochlanns.

Glorious and powerful was Colga yet somewhat there was to trouble him, and amidst all the splendors of the palace he sat with bowed head, pondering a way of relief. And he called a meeting of his chief people on the broad green plain before the palace. Wearing his Ionar braided with precious stones and carrying his two bright bronze-handled spears in his hand he went forth to meet the people when they had gathered together. Then, from his high throne, he spoke to them and his voice rang clear in the ears of the most distant: "My people," said he, "have I been to you an unjust ruler, or have you

Bruighean Caorthainn [Brēen Cär'hyenn]: Gaelic for Palace of the Quicken Trees. Quicken Tree: The mountain ash. Ionar: Military cloak.

found any cause for complaint against me, your sovereign lord and king?" As with one voice they answered: "O king, mighty and just, Wielder of the Hard Weapons, thy people find no fault with thee, command us and we obey."

Then spoke King Colga: "Know you not that I am called king of the tribes of Lochlann and of the islands of the sea? Yet there is one island which acknowledges not my rule."

And the people, not knowing this, asked which island.

"It is Eire, the island of the green hills. My forefathers held sway over it, and many of our brave warriors died there in battle. There fell Balor of the Mighty Blows and Kethlenda, his queen. There too fell Iran and Slana sisters of the king and many others. Our hosts indeed once held this land under tribute; but the men of Eire arose and drove them into the sea, which even yet is red with their blood, and Eire no longer owns the sway of the Lochlann king. Once again, O men of Lochlann, we must subdue that island and hold it subject as long as the ends of the rushes are brown."

"Wise art thou, O King," said the chiefs of

Lochlann "and the council is worthy of our acceptance."

Then, swift scouts and couriers and estafets mustered the king's fighting men, and they made ready their white-sailed, curve-sided ships; and chasing the white sea horses through the billowy brine, made neither stop nor stay until they had landed on the shores of Ulad.

Now this was three hundred three and thirty years after the death of the King of Israel on Calvary; and, at this time Cormac son of Art, son of Conn the Hundred Fighter, was king of Eire, and held his court at Teamhair-na-Righ.

When Cormac heard that a foreign fleet had landed on the shores of his far north province of Ulad, he sent messengers with tidings of the invasion to Alvin of the green hill slopes where lived Finn the head chieftain of the four clans of the Feine, the brave and ever ready defenders of the island of Eire.

Then Finn sent word to every part of Eire where the Feine dwelt and bade them meet him at a certain place near the coast where the Lochlann army were encamped. When the forces of Finn had met together without delay they attacked the foreigners, and fiercely the foreigners

met the onset. Now it seemed that victory was for the fearless Lochlanns; and now the shouts of the sons of Eire rose triumphant above the din of clashing spears. At last, Oscar, son of Oisín, meeting king Colga closed in deadly conflict hand to hand with him. Soon, his bright shield rent, his helmet dented with sword blows, the blood from his deep wounds welling forth from beneath his pierced armor, fell Colga of the Hard Weapons, slain by Oscar, son of Oisín.

At sunset there remained not one of the mighty men of Lochlann, except king Colga's youngest son, Midac. Finn, returning to Allen, brought Midac with him, and gave him a high post as befitted a prince. While Midac was growing to manhood, he hunted and feasted with the Feine; and fought with them when they fought, and all the while he made himself acquainted with their haunts, and hunting grounds, their palaces and fortresses; and in particular with their manner of carrying on war.

And it happened one day in a council of the Feine, that Conan Mael the son of Morna stood up and said: "O king, have you not noticed that the young prince Midac is silent and distant and

Midac [Mēē'ach].

that he takes much pains to acquaint himself with all matters pertaining to the Feine?"

"What you say, O son of Morna, is true," answered the king, and then he asked Conan to give his opinions as to what should be done.

Said Conan: "I advise that the Prince Midac be given lands and a household of his own, apart from the palace of Allen, where he can no longer listen to our councils and learn our secrets and our plans."

Then the king sent for the prince and said to him: "Thou knowest, Midac, thou hast always been dealt with as becomes a prince. It is not meet that thou shouldst abide longer in the house of another, choose therefore the two cantreds in all Eire that please thee best, and they shall be given to thee and thy descendants forever as a patrimony." So Midac chose the rich cantred of Kenri on the Shannon; and the cantred of the island lying next to it on the north, at the other side of the river. Midac had good reason for choosing these two cantreds, for the river opens out between them like a great sea, and in the sheltered harbors ships could anchor in safety, and he hoped some day to bring a fleet and an army into Eire to avenge on Finn and the Feine

the defeat and death of his father and his countrymen. For fourteen years Midac lived in his new home, and there was no Brugaid in Eire richer or more prosperous than he. One day Finn and the Feine went to hunt in the district of Fermorc, and over the plain of Hy Conall Gavra. And when the chase was about to begin, Finn and a few of his companions went to the top of the hill of Knockfierna to see the sport. There they pitched their tents and made soft couches of rushes and heather, and dug cooking places; for they intended the hill to be a resting place for the hunters. They had not been there long before they saw a tall warrior coming toward them. He wore a splendid coat of mail of Lochlann workmanship, and over it a mantle of fine satin, dyed in divers colors. A broad shield hung on his left shoulder; and, in the morning sun, his helmet glittered like polished silver. A long sword, with golden hilt and enamelled sheath, hung at his left side, and he held in his right hand his two sharp, death-dealing spears.

Wonderfully majestic was his bearing; and as he approached he saluted the king in dignified and courteous words. To Finn's inquiry as

Brugaid [Brōō'ā]: A farmer or husbandman.

to whence he came, and what tidings he brought he replied: "Of the place from which I have come nothing need be spoken; and no tidings have I except that I am a Ferdana, and I have brought thee a poem, O King of the Feine."

"A mountain top is not the place for poetry," said Finn. "Remain here with us until the chase is ended, then you shall come with me to one of our palaces, and there I will listen to your poem and bestow on you befitting gifts."

But the unknown Ferdana answered: "To go to your palace is not my wish; and I now put you under geasa, which will compel you to listen to my poem and explain its meaning."

So Finn was compelled to listen while the Ferdana sang:

"I saw a house by a river's shore,
Famed through Eire in days of yore;
Its Lord deep skilled in fairy lore.
No spoiler can rive its golden store;
Safe it stands when the torrents pour.
Feasting and joy for evermore
To all who enter its open door."

"I can explain that poem!" said Finn, "the house by the river's shore is the palace of Bruga, where dwells Angus, a man more skilled in magic arts than any in Eire."

Bruga [Brōō' ah].

"Thou hast divined my meaning;" said the stranger, "canst thou also explain this rann?"

"I saw to the south a bright faced queen,
With couch of crystal and robe of green;
Slowly she moves; and yet her speed
Exceeds the pace of the swiftest steed."

"The queen you speak of is the river Boyne, which flows by the southern wall of the palace of Bruga. Her couch of crystal is the river's sandy bed; her robe of green, the grassy plain through which it flows. The river indeed flows slowly, but its waters traverse the whole world in seven years, and that is more than the swiftest steed can do."

"Truly hast thou spoken," said the Ferdana grasping more tightly his polished spears.

And then Finn besought him to tell who he was, and whence he came; but Conan Mael spoke saying: "Wise art thou, O Finn, and thou hast unravelled the mystical ranns; yet, in this has thy wisdom failed thee; thou hast not distinguished between friend and foe, for this Ferdana is Midac, whom thou didst bring up with much honor in thy own house; but who is now thy enemy. Long has he enjoyed the patrimony with which thou didst endow him, and though

he is one of the Feine, never has he offered the hospitality of his palace to thee or them."

Said Midac: "My house has never been without a banquet fit for either king or chief; and, an invitation you did not need, for I was one of you: But let that pass; this night a feast will be ready and I put you under geasa to come and partake of it. Remember, tonight Midac, the prince, awaits Finn and his Feine soldiers in the Palace of the Quicken Trees."

"And having pointed out the way, the Ferdana turned to go saying he must hasten to have all things in readiness when they should arrive."

Finn held council with his companions, and it was agreed that the king's son Oisín and five other chiefs with their followers should tarry on the hill until the hunting party returned, while Finn and the remaining chieftains went to the Palace of the Quicken Trees. And it was also arranged that Finn should send back word as soon as possible after his arrival telling how he fared. It was also arranged that after the hunting party returned Oisín and his companions were to go likewise to partake of Midac's hospitality.

As Finn and his party neared the palace they marveled greatly at its size and splendor; and

they wondered that they had never seen it before. It stood on a green plain surrounded by many quicken trees, on which hung thick clusters of scarlet berries. A broad river flowed through the green plain and its bank nearest the palace was rocky and high, and a steep pathway led down to a ford.

Everything was silent and lonely, and to their surprise no one came to greet them. Finn, fearing foul play, would have turned back had he not bethought him of his geasa and his promise. The great door of the palace was wide open, but when they entered they found no one—neither host nor guests nor attendants. Never had they seen a banquet hall more splendid. A huge fire, burning brightly in the middle of the hall, gave forth no smoke, but a sweet perfume which refreshed and delighted the heroes. Everywhere were couches covered with rugs and soft, glossy furs. The curved walls were of wood: close jointed and polished like ivory. Each board was painted differently from those above and below, so that the sides of the room from the floor to roof were all radiant with color. Without waiting longer, the chieftains seated themselves on

The houses of the ancient Gaels were of wood.

the couches and rugs to await the coming of their host.

Presently a door opened and Midac entered. He looked at the heroes one after another, but spoke not one word, only turned quickly and went out, shutting the great door behind him.

Finn and his friends were unable at first to speak for wonder at this strange proceeding; and they remained sitting in silence until Finn, when he had somewhat recovered from his surprise, said: "My friends, I know you are no less surprised than I at the manner of our reception: our host speaks us no word of welcome; and, although we were invited to a feast, there is none prepared for us."

"But is not this still more a cause for wonder?" said Gaul MacMorna, "the fire, which was clear and smokeless when we first saw it and which smelled more sweetly than the flowers of the plain, now fills the hall with an offensive odor, and sends up clouds of black, sooty smoke."

"And more wonderful even," said Dathkin, the strong-limbed, "the boards in the walls of this banquet hall which were smooth and close jointed, and glorious all over with bright colors, when we came, are now nothing but

Dathkin [Də'kin].

rough planks, clumsily fastened together with quicken tree withes, and as rude and unshapen as if they had been hacked and hewed with a blunt axe.

"And behold," said Foilan, the son of Aed the Lesser, "instead of the seven great doors of the palace wide open and looking pleasantly to the sunshine, as they were on our arrival, I see now only one small, narrow door; close fastened and facing straight to the north."

"Most wonderful of all," said Conan Mael, "the rich rugs, and furs, and couches which were under us when first we seated ourselves, are all gone! Not a fragment remains, and we are now sitting on the bare, damp earth; and it feels as cold as the snow of one night!"

Then Finn spoke again: "You know, my friends, that I never tarry in a house having only one door. Let one of you then arise, and break open that narrow door, that we may go forth from this foul smoky den."

"That, shall I do," cried Conan; and, so saying, he seized his long spear and planting it in the floor, point downward, he attempted to spring to his feet, but was unable to move. "Alas, my friends," cried he with a groan of

anguish, "this is most wonderful of all; I am firmly fixed by some druidical spell to the cold clay floor of the Palace of the Quicken Trees."

And all the others, likewise, found it impossible to move from the place where they sat. When Gaul had sufficiently recovered from surprise to speak, he said: "It seems clear, O king, that Midac has planned this treachery, and that great danger lies before us. I beseech you, place your thumb under your tooth of knowledge and let us know the truth so that we may hasten to consider how best to escape."

Whereupon Finn placed his thumb under his tooth of knowledge and mused for a little while. Then suddenly withdrawing his thumb, he sank back in his seat and groaned aloud.

"May it be the will of the gods," said Gaul, "that it is the pain of thy thumb that has caused thee to utter that groan."

"Alas, not so," replied Finn, "I fear that my death is near; and the death of my dear companions. There is now no hope for our escape from Midac's treacherous snare; for in the palace of the island, there is at this moment an army of foreigners, brought thither by Midac for our destruction. Sinsar of the battles, with

Sinsar [Shin'shar]: The Elder.

sixteen warlike princes under his command, has come from Greece. His son, Borba the Haughty, has come also commanding a band of fierce and haughty knights. The three kings of the Island of the Torrent are already on their way, furious as dragons. It is they who by their sorcery have enabled Midac to prevent our leaving the palace; for this cold clay we sit on is a part of the soil of the enchanted island of the Torrent. It was brought by Midac to his palace and placed here with fearful spells. Never can our enchantment be broken, unless the blood of those kings be first sprinkled on the clay. When they heard these tidings, some of the heroes shed bitter tears in silence; and others lamented aloud.

But Finn again spoke, and said he: "It becomes us not, my friends, to weep and wail like women, even though we are in danger of death. Let us rather sound the Dord Fian, sweetly and plaintively as we are wont to do, that it may be a comfort to us before we die."

So the fated warriors sang: And while they were singing, Ficna, the son of Finn, and Isna, the son of Svena Selga, came from the hill of Knockfierna for, as Finn had sent no messengers

to the Feine, whom he had left behind him on the hill, they feared some evil had befallen him and his companions. They waited until nightfall and then set out to ascertain the true state of affairs. When they neared the Palace of the Quicken Trees, night had darkened around them, and although they could not see the palace they heard the Feine within singing the loud, slow strains of the Dord-Fian.

"Things go well with our friends," said Isna joyfully.

But Ficna replied: "Alas, I cannot think so, for it is only in time of trouble or danger that Finn is wont to have the Dord-Fian sounded, in a manner so slow and sad."

When the song was ended, Finn noticed the low hum of conversation outside, and recognizing the voice of Ficna he said to him: "Come not nearer, my son, for this place abounds in dangerous spells, and here Midac holds us fast in the sorcery of the kings of the island of the Torrent."

But both Ficna and Isna said that never would they return to safety leaving their much loved chieftain in deadly danger.

Then said Finn: "In yonder palace of the

island are gathered mighty hosts of foreigners, plotting our destruction; but, to come thither they must needs pass the ford under the shadow of these walls. The ford is rugged and hard to cross, and one good man standing in the steep, narrow entrance at the hither side might dispute the passage for a time against many. Go now and defend this ford, and haply help may come in time."

Then Ficna and Isna departed rejoicing to think that they might perhaps be of assistance to the brave but stricken chieftains who were imprisoned in the enchanted palace. And they agreed between them that Isna should guard the ford alone, while Ficna set out straightway for the palace of the island.

Here, all the day, had Midac and the foreigners feasted and drank; and were merry in the thought that Finn and his people were securely bound, in the charmed durance of the palace of the Quicken Trees. And at eventide spoke an Irla of Sinsar of the Battles, and said: "I will now go to the palace of the Quicken Trees and bring hither the head of Finn, son of Cumal; and I shall gain thereby much renown and be honored by Sinsar of the Battles."

So he went taking with him a goodly number of his own knights. When they reached the ford near the palace of the Quicken Trees, the Irla, looking through the darkness, thought he saw a warrior standing at the other brink and he called aloud to ask who was there, and whether he belonged to the noble or the ignoble races of the world. And Insa answered that he belonged to the household of Finn, the son of Cumal.

“Lo,” said the Irla, “we are going to the Palace of the Quicken Trees to bring Finn’s head to Sinsar of the battles, and thou shalt come with us and lead us to the door.”

“O champion of Sinsar,” answered Isna, “I guard this ford for Finn, and never, I warn you, shall I allow a foe of his to pass.”

“Force the ford,” cried the Irla to his knights, “then shall we see if yonder hero can fight as well as he threatens.”

So Insa defended the ford and when the conflict was over, the shore was heaped with the bodies of the slain. Those of the combatants who remained alive fled away and Isna was fain to rest after the long hard fray.

But the Irla, seeing so many of his knights

slain, was mad with wrath, and snatching up his sword and shield he attacked Isna. Now the Irla was fresh and strong, while Isna was weary and sore wounded; and at length the young warrior fell in the ford, and the Irla beheaded him and, exulting in his victory, brought the head away.

Finn and his companions, sitting in miserable plight, in the Palace of the Quicken Trees heard the clash of arms at the ford, and the shouts and groans of warriors. After a time all was still again and they knew not how the fight had ended.

The Irla returning to the palace of the island, overtook, Ficna, reconnoitering near the palace gate. Ficna spoke to the Irla and asked him whither he had come.

"I come," replied the Irla, "from the ford of the palace of the Quicken Trees, and lo, I bring with me the head of a young champion, who opposed our passage, and slew our knights, as we were on our way to take Finn, the son of Cumal. And lo, here thou mayest behold the head of the defender of the ford; for him have I slain in fierce and single combat, and I bring this gory trophy to Sinsar of the battles, King of Greece."

"Alas, dear youth," said Ficna, "only this morning I saw the light of valor in those dim eyes, and the bloom of youth on that pale cheek!"

Then wrathfully he spoke: "Knowest thou to whom thou hast shown this ghastly witness of thy triumph?"

"Art thou not one of the Knights of Sinsar?" asked the Irla.

"I am not; and neither shalt thou be after this hour," answered the Ficna, drawing his sword. And they fought where they stood; and the foreign Irla fell by the avenging hand of Ficna, the son of Finn.

Ficna brought the Irla's head to the Palace of the Quicken Trees and showed it to Finn, and related all his adventures. And Finn, hearing of the death of Isna, wept for his loved one slain and then he said: "Victory and blessing be with thee my son; nobly hast thou done, and now return and guard the ford, and peradventure our friends may send help in time."

So Ficna went and sat on the brink of the ford.

Now Kiaran, brother of the slain Irla, seeing that he remained away so long from the palace of the island, said to some of his followers: "It

is a long time since my brother left for the palace of the Quicken Trees. I fear that he and his people have fared ill in their quest."

And Kiaran went to seek his brother, taking with him a company of knights. When they had come to the ford they saw Ficna at the far side, and Kiaran called out and asked who he was, and who had made such slaughter at the ford.

"I am one of the household of Finn, the son of Cumal!" answered Ficna, "and by his command I guard the ford. As to the slaughter of yonder knights: I warn you come not to this side of the ford, for I shall reply not in words but in deeds."

Then Kiaran and his men rushed through the water, blind with rage, and after a fearful conflict, only one man was left alive; and he sped quickly back to the palace of the island to tell the tale, leaving Ficna weary and wounded on the river brink.

Midac, hearing the tidings, was very wroth and he bethought him of a ruse: Said he: "Among the companions of Finn is Conan Mael, a man who of all the men of Eire has the greatest appetite and is fondest of eating and drink-

ing. To him will I go with a choice party of my own brave men, and bring him savory food and drink—not indeed to delight him but to torment him with the sight and smell of what he cannot taste.

So it happened that Midac and his men were trying to force the ford from Ficna when Fatha and Dyna of the Bright Face were on their way, from the hill of Knockfierna, to find out why their companions lingered so long in the palace of the Quicken Trees. And Fatha said: “I hear in the distance the sound of single combat; the combat of mighty heroes.”

“And I too,” said Dyna, “hear that sound which quickens the blood in every warrior’s heart, let us hasten to the scene of the fray.”

They ran like the wind until they reached the hill-brow over the river, and looking across in the dim moonlight, they saw the whole ford heaped with bodies of the slain, and the two heroes fighting to the death at the far side. Dyna hastened to the spot and putting his finger in the silken loop of his spear, threw a deadly cast with unerring aim and struck Midac so that the iron spear head went right through his body and the length of a warrior’s hand beyond.

Fatha [Faw’hä].

And Midac, knowing that he was wounded to death by the spear of Dyna, struck more fiercely at Ficna, felling him to the earth, upon which he too sank to rise no more.

Then said Dyna to Midac: "If I had found thee dead, I would have passed thee untouched, but now that I have overtaken thee alive, I must needs behead thee, for thy head will be to Finn a worthy eric for his son."

And Dyna, forthwith, left Fatha at the ford and brought the head of Midac to Finn, and Finn having listened to Dyna's account of this last conflict said: "Victory and blessings be with thee, Dyna, for what thou hast done; and, I pray thee, continue to aid us well and faithfully or we shall certainly perish. Here we sit, spell-bound, and naught else but the blood of the three fierce kings of the island of Torrent sprinkled on this clay can release us. Guard the ford until the rising of the sun, for then I know the Feine will come to help you."

"O Finn, this arm shall never fail thee; and faithful is Fatha to the king of Feine." And bidding his friends farewell, Dyna was about to return to the ford when Conan Mael said with a groan: "Miserable the hour in which I came

to this palace; cold and comfortless the clay on which I sit; but, worst of all to be without food and drink so long. There is plenty of wine and savory food yonder in the palace of the island, Dyna, and I beseech you, for I can no longer bear this torture, bring me from the palace as much food as I can eat, and a drinking horn of wine."

"The wind of misfortune to one uttering such selfish words" said Dyna. "It is not enough that we must defend you from the foreigners; but, also, food must be procured for the gluttonous Conan Mael!"

"Alas, Dyna-na-man, if a lovely maiden made this request, you would fly to please her; but you, who have already crossed me four times in my courtships, would now be pleased to see me die of hunger in this dungeon."

"Cease your upbraiding, and I will bring you food," said Dyna, "for it is better to face danger than to suffer revilings."

So he went back to where Fatha was guarding the ford, and said to him: "I needs must go to the Palace of the Island in order to procure food for Conan Mael."

But Fatha told him of the food which Midac

had placed at the other side of the ford, and urged him to bring a good meal of this to Conan.

"If I did that," said Dyna, "he would taunt me with bringing him food taken from the hands of dead men; and, from his blow one may recover; but, not from the venom of his tongue."

Dyna then hastened to the palace and as he drew near he heard the sound of revelry, and peering warily through the open door, he saw the feast-tables spread, and Sinsar of the Battles and his son Borba high seated over all. Dyna entered a dark passage way, near the door, and standing silent and stern, with drawn sword, watched his opportunity and when an attendant, with a large, ornamented drinking horn filled with wine, passed close to him he struck off his head with a swift, sure blow and snatched the horn from the man's hand, before he fell. So deftly was it done that not a drop of wine was spilt. Dyna was able also to obtain a dish of food from near where the King sat at the table, and get off without hindrance or harm of any kind.

When he reached the ford he found Fatha lying fast asleep on the bank. This caused him to wonder; yet knowing the young warrior was

worn out with watching and toil, he left him undisturbed and went to the palace of the Quicken Trees with the food for Conan.

"I have here a goodly meal of choice food; how am I to give it to thee, Conan?" called Dyna as, bearing the food with him, he stood outside the palace under the low branches of the Quicken Trees.

Said Conan: "Throw it towards me from yonder little opening."

Dyna did so; and as fast as he threw the food, Conan caught it in his large hands and ate it ravenously. And when it was all gone, Dyna said: "I have here a fine drinking horn of good wine; how am I to give it to thee?"

Conan answered: "There is a place behind the palace where with a light, airy bound you will be able to reach the lower parapet. Come from that directly over me, and break a hole in the roof with your spear, and through that you can pour the wine down to me." Dyna did as Conan told him, and as he poured down the wine, Conan, with upturned face, opened his great mouth and swallowed every drop.

Dyna then returned to the ford. He found Fatha still asleep but did not awaken him.

When the Kings of the Island of the Torrent heard that Midac and his knights were slain at the ford they said: "The young King of Lochlann did wrong to make this attempt without asking our council. To us alone belongs the right to slay those who by our spells sit bound in the Palace of the Quicken Trees."

Thereupon the kings with a strong party set out, and soon reached the ford. Looking across in the dim light they saw Dyna and greeted him, saying: "The countenance of a pleasant moon to you, O Chieftain," and with fair words they sought to beguile him into leaving the ford. But Dyna stood up straight and tall as a pillar and scowled across the ford: "The wind of misfortune to you, perfidious foreigners! Attempt not to approach the Palace of the Quicken Trees, for I will defend the ford as long as life shall last."

And then Dyna, seeking to awake Fatha, therewith, cried: "Pharra! Pharra!" the battle cry of the clans of Eire.

The hostile knights rushing toward Dyna impetuously assailed him, but the strong hero met them as a rock meets waves and slew them when they came within reach of his sword. The

Pharra! Pharra! Beware! Beware!

crashing of weapons and the riving of swords awaked Fatha, and then he too turned and attacked the foe and many a knight fell at his right and at his left.

Long and furious was the fight; and at last the three dragon-like kings lay slain upon the fateful ford. Dyna, striking off their heads, returned followed by Fatha to the Palace of the Quicken Trees. As they drew near the door Finn, knowing their voices and footsteps, called loudly to know how it fared with them: "For," said he, "the crashing and the din of that battle exceeded all that we have yet heard, and we know not how it has ended."

Dyna made haste to answer: "O, King of the Feine, Fatha and I have slain the three Kings of the Island of the Torrent: Lo, here are their gory heads!"

"Victory and blessings be with thee, Dyna! You and Fatha have fought a valiant fight, worthy of the Feine of Eire. Now sprinkle the door with blood."

Dyna did so, and in a moment the door flew open with a loud crash. Pale and faint the champions sat upon the cold, clay floor; but no sooner was it sprinkled by the blood of the three

kings than they sprang to their feet with exulting cries. The spell was indeed broken, and joyfully embracing each other the freed heroes gave thanks to Neid, the god of battle, for their release.

But danger still threatened, and Finn's first thought was to provide against it. Said he: "The venom of these odious spells has withered our strength, so that we are not able to fight, but at sunrise they will lose their power," and returning to Dyna and Fatha he told them that they must guard the ford until the rising of the sun, when he and his knights should have recovered their strength.

A few who had escaped from the last battle at the ford brought back tidings to Sinsar of the fate of the Three Kings. But of the release of those who had been spellbound in the Palace of the Quicken Trees they could not tell, as they did not know that it had taken place.

When Borba, the Haughty, had heard the account of defeat and death at the ford, he arose and said: "Feeble warriors were they who tried to cross this ford. Hither I shall now go, and when I return will bring the head of Finn, the son of Cumal, and place it at my father's feet."

Neid [Nā].

And marshaling his warriors without delay Borba marched forth; and when Dyna and Fatha saw the dark mass drawing nigh they longed in their hearts for morning. Not of themselves they thought, for they had never trembled before any foe, but they feared the danger for Finn and his warriors.

Again an unequal fight was filling the ford with slaughter. But soon the sun rose over the broad plain of Kenri, and as its first rays glinted from their lances the withering spell went forth from the bones and sinews of the heroes who had been imprisoned in the palace of the Quicken Trees. Joyfully they snatched up their arms and hastened down to the ford. But Dathkin, the strong limbed, they sent to take the news to Oisin at Knockfierna.

The beams of the risen sun now glittered bright on helmet and sword-blade and as the fight went on, Gaul, son of Morna, slew Borba, the Haughty.

A messenger brought the news of his son's death to Sinsar and his people. Cries of sorrow went up on all sides; but the king concealing his grief, summoned his whole host and marched them toward the battlefield of the ford.

When the messenger to Knockfierna had told his story, the entire body of heroes there encamped set out for the Palace of the Quicken Trees, and arrived on the hill-brow over the ford just as Sinsar and his army approached from the opposite side.

And now the fight ceased for a while and the two armies were put in battle array; and, on neither side was there any desire to avoid the combat.

The Feine were divided into four battalions: Clan Baskin; Clan Morna; Clan Smoil and Clan Navnan, and together they marched forward under their silken banners. Their helmets were bright with precious gems, their broad, beautiful shields they bore on their left shoulders; their keen edged swords hung at their left sides and they held their deadly lances in their hands. And when they closed in conflict such display of valor had never before been seen in Eire.

Oscar, resting for a moment from the toil of battle, looked around and saw Sinsar guarded by his best warriors. Rushing through the opposing ranks he drew near the king. Sinsar laughed grimly when he saw him, for he was glad in his heart expecting to revenge his son's

death by slaying with his own hand Finn's grandson.

Then these two great heroes fought a deadly battle and in the end, Oscar, with a blow that no shield or buckler could withstand, swept the head from Sinsar's body. Seeing this a shout of triumph went up from the Feine, and the foreigners instantly gave way pursued and slain on every side. A few threw away their arms and escaped to the shore; and, hastily unmooring their ships, sailed swiftly away to their own country, and the winds of Eire blowing across the waters bore to their ears the music of a triumphant Dord Fian.

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